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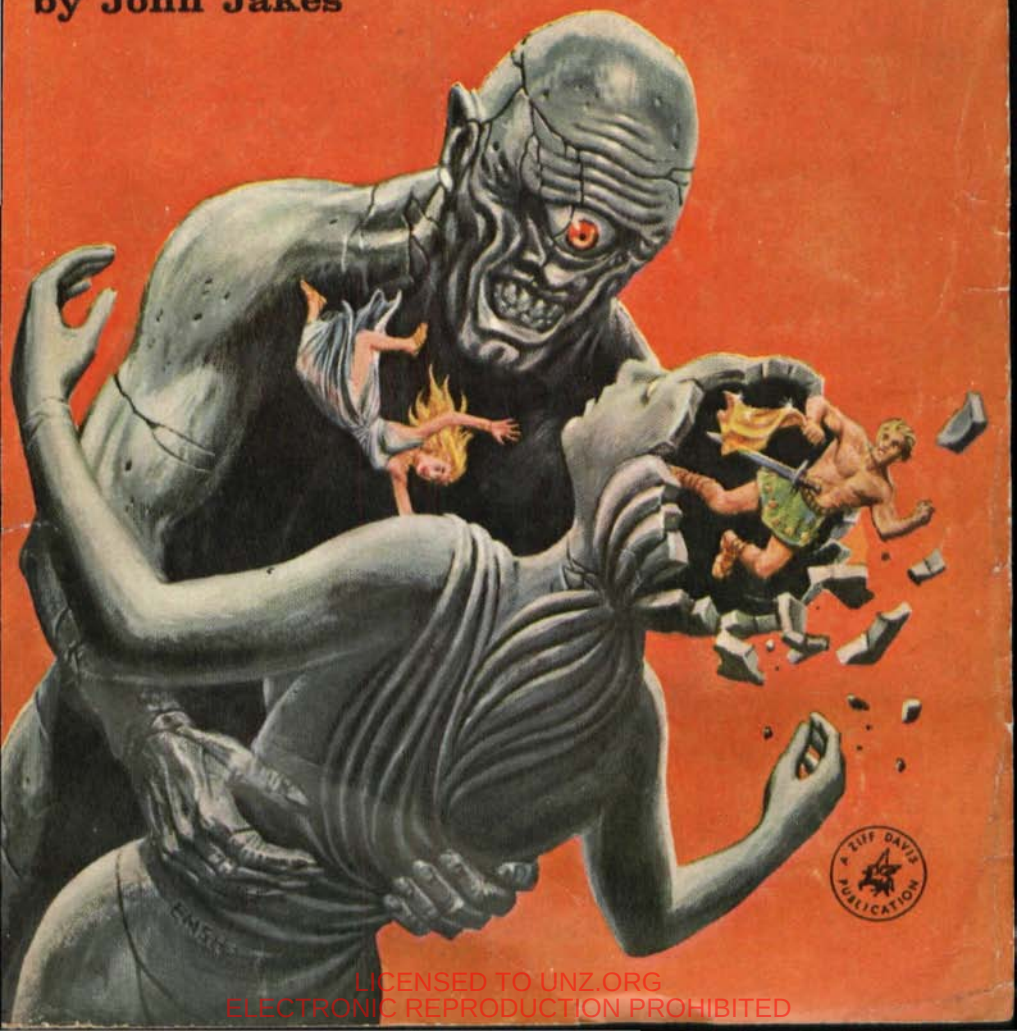
by John Jakes



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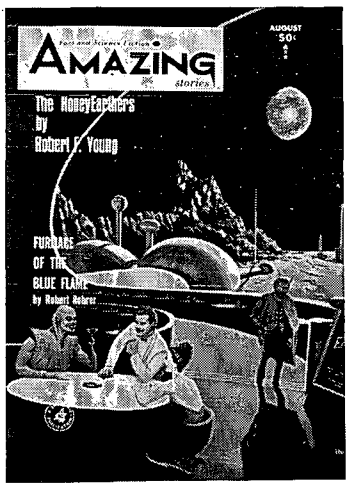

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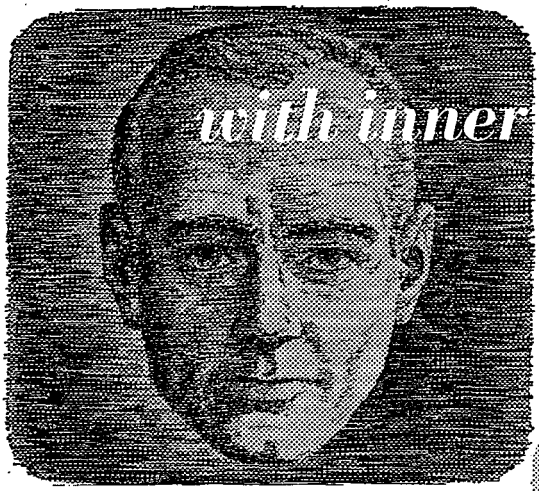

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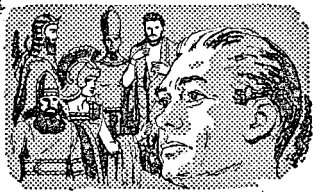

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STORIES OF IMAGINATION

FANTASTIC

AUGUST 1964
Volume 13 Number 8

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212 ORegon 9-7200
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NOT long ago a few whispers were dropped about hush-hush Soviet military experimentation with telepathy as a means of instant communication for men in space. Our own armed forces are, presumably, also working in this area. Now comes the report that civilians, too, are planning new tests of the psi factor, based on new experimental concepts.

Key man is Dr. Angelos Tanagras, 87-year-old president of the Greek Society for Psychical Research. Tanagras, who has been working in the field of psychic research for over 50 years, said that he conducted "more or less successful" long-distance thought transmission tests as long as 35 years ago. Working with other professors, Tanagras claims that ideas were transmitted telepathically from Vienna, Leipzig and Berlin to Athens. During these tests (which more recently have been conducted between Athens and Cambridge and Athens and New York), a "transmitting group" concentrates on acting as a sending agent while the group at the other end acts as receiver. Transmitter thinks a picture and receiver writes down what it was. One of his successes involved transmittal of the idea of a *picture* of a star; the receiving group wrote the *word* "star."

Tanagras told interviewers that he did not believe telepathy —or any psychical phenomena— depended on anything material such as the existence of "cerebral electro-magnetic waves." He feels that "thought transmission, from man to man, at whatever distance, is a normal phenomenon." Currently Tanagras and his associates are working with "new" methods at "longer" distances and have achieved "surprising" results based on a process they call the photography of thought.

Well, we wish them all good luck, and no one would be happier than we to hear that they really have the whole psi bit taped. But there remains in us a grain of highly unpsychi doubt. Until Dr. Tanagras becomes more specific and less laconic about his "new" methods and his "surprising" results, we will believe that the frontier for experimental psi phenomena lies not in Athens, but still on the Rhine.—NL.

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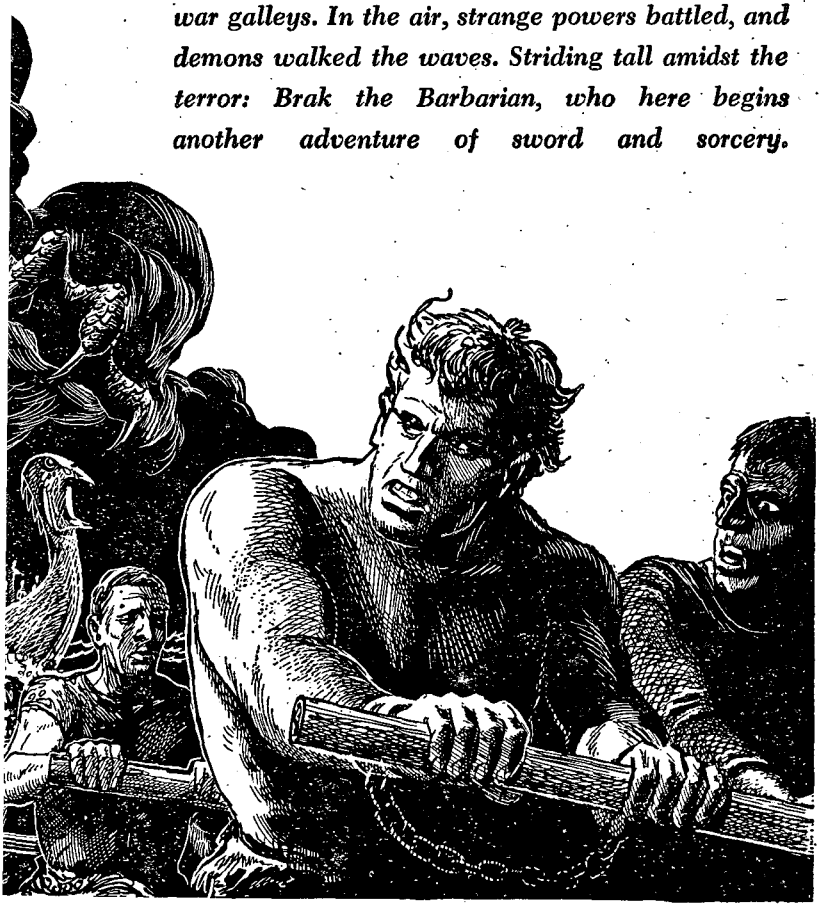
WHEN THE IDOLS WALKED

By JOHN JAKES

Illustrator EMSH

Part One of Two Parts

From the storm-lashed Dark Sea the scaly-headed apparition loomed over the manacled rowers in the war galleys. In the air, strange powers battled, and demons walked the waves. Striding tall amidst the terror: Brak the Barbarian, who here begins another adventure of sword and sorcery.



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Chapter I

DOWN from the north rolled thick black stormclouds. They swept the sky like an enemy in pursuit, spreading from horizon to horizon. The wind increased. The mighty sails of the war galleys beating along the Dark Sea snapped and cracked. Blazoned upon the great blood-hued sail of the admiral's flagship was a gigantic, crudely-painted image of the horned goat-god of the Gords. The god's leering face seemed to grimace in awful contortions as the wind rose still higher, tearing at the sail.

In the rowing pits of the flagship, bedraggled men turned their heads to watch the ominous clouds boiling in the wake of the armada. Many of the rowers bore scabrous wounds on their bodies. All were ill-clad. Most had the sick shine of defeat in their eyes. Above the moan of the wind and the crashing of the Dark Sea's waters against the flagship prow, a faint muttering of fear broke out.

Wrists and ankle-chains clanked. More of the rowers turned to stare behind them at the darkness closing down upon the Gord fleet.

One of the men chained in the pits smiled a cruel smile as he craned his head around to stare at the blackness. He was a man who did not seem to belong in the chains that held him fast to the oar. His body was gigantic, wide-shouldered. His arms were brawny. His yellow hair was twisted into a long, barbaric braid that hung down his back. His only garment was a lion's hide wrapped around his middle.

From the quarterdeck of the flagship the row-master's gavel began to hammer faster.

"Stroke! Stroke! Stroke!"

The yellow-haired man stared with sullen pleasure at the clouds boiling up close behind the fleet of seventy Gord warships. He muttered, "These pig-soldiers who attack their neighbors without warning or provocation deserve to be swallowed up in such a foul sea. I'd welcome the sinking of the whole lot of them, though I don't especially want to go with them. But there's no chance of outrunning that cloud. It blows too fast, too blackly."

The rower next to the big man did not care to comment. He merely whispered, "Turn around, barbarian! Else we'll—ah, the gods protect us! Why was I unlucky enough to be chained next to a savage?"

"You!" came a shout from the walkway between the pits. "Barbarian! Pull your oar!"

SLOWLY the great-shouldered man whose name was Brak looked up. On the walkway stood

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the Gord overseer fingering his coiled lash. Brak's eyes burned in the lead-colored light that covered the Dark Sea from cliff to coastal cliff. Resting on his oar, Brak spat.

The overseer's arm went back, snapped forward. The long lash coiled around the barbarian's chest.

When it tore loose it left a serpentine of blood around his torso. Brak came to his feet in the swaying pit, growling angrily, yanking at his chains.

The prisoner beside Brak was gibbering, begging him to be calm. But the pain of the whip had inflamed the barbarian. For a moment he was without reason. He pulled wildly on the chains and made growling sounds, like one of the beasts of the wild lands of the north from whence he had come.

A huge wave broke across the bow of the Gord flagship. Spray cascaded over Brak. The cloud of hate passed from his mind.

Another wave struck amidships. The galley rolled. Brak tumbled onto his bench with his leg-chain tangled. The overseer laughed. He drew the end of his whip through his free hand to wipe away the blood, walked on.

But the overseer's assertion of power was of small consequence. The war-fleet was rapidly being overhauled by the storm. The pitching of the flagship became more erratic. Smaller ships fell behind.

"Stroke!" cried the rowing-master from the quarterdeck. "Stroke! *Stroke!*"

Brak fell into the rhythm, hauling on the oar with the six other men on the bench. He felt a dismal gloom, created not so much by fear of the impending storm as by his helplessness against the threat posed by his captors' fright. When the whirlwind from the black clouds struck, they would soon enough forget their cruelty to the hundreds of prisoners who, like Brak, were helping to row the Gord soldiers homeward. But in their forgetting, in their panic, the ships might be destroyed. Brak had no illusions about the Gords wishing to save their slave rowers.

The big barbarian felt naked without the broadsword that had slapped against his hip only two days ago. That day, his pony's hooves had carried him down from a plateau to the little port city of the Mirkan people, at the head of the Dark Sea.

Bound on a long journey to seek his fortune in the warm climes of Khurdisan far southward, Brak's arrival in the city of the Mirkans was wholly accidental, the result of a chance turning in the road. Arriving, he had gone to sleep on a pallet in a flea-bitten carvanseri. He intend-

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ed to rise next dawn and continue his journey.

During the night there had been drumming. Men with torches shrieked alarms in the streets. The Gords, short, squat men who wore leather armor trimmed with fur, had appeared out of the night to attack the Mirkans. At the same time, the Gord fleet engaged the pitifully few fighting ships of the Mirkans off the harbor mole.

THE day's fighting had been a holocaust. On his huge body Brak still bore cuts and small scars. He remembered loping off several heads in the caravanseri yard while the sky reddened with flames of the sacked town. But the Gords had the double advantage of surprise and numbers. Like most of the able-bodied Mirkans, Brak had been caught.

He was herded down to the Gord galleys and impressed as a slave-rower. Only the sudden appearance of the stormclouds in the wake of the triumphantly homeward-bound Gords had lessened the success of the attack in which Brak had been trapped by accident.

"Stroke!" cried the rowing-master. "*Stroke!*"

Brak bent his huge back into the effort. Silently he raged against the poor fool calling for greater effort. It was obvious that the ships, even with a combination of sail and oars, could not outrun the storm. The black clouds were closer now. They covered the whole northern horizon from sea to heaven.

The soldiers on the flagship gripped their spears and leather-clad shields and watched, helpless, while the Gord admiral, a porcine, bearded stump of a man, exhorted the rowing-master to quicken the beat still further.

Slightly ahead and to port of the flagship, Brak noticed a jutting headland. As he pulled mindlessly on his oar, he saw several of the Mirkan captives give sick smiles, whisper among themselves. Gradually, as the war-fleet drew abreast of the headland, Brak could make out a large, up-thrusting island. It separated a huge bay into two channels. Through blowing mist the buildings of a great city were barely visible on the coast behind these bays. Inside a tall watchtower on the headland, torches flickered like weird little fireflies.

"Well," said the Mirkan who earlier had urged Brak to curb his temper, "there's one kingdom these sons of hell won't live to destroy. Quite a joke, isn't it?" The man's scrawny ribs thrust against his emaciated chest in a spasm of weak laughter. "To save Rodar's people we shall all have to be drowned,

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together, friend and enemy alike."

"Who is Rodar?" Brak asked. "The ruler of that place partly hidden in the mist?"

"Aye. The city-state is under the dominion of Rodar, Prince of the Two Bays. It's been foretold that the Gords want to be masters of the whole of the Dark Sea. They began with us, the Mirkans, at the northern end. Certainly Rodar's kingdom would have been next. Though small, it's the most powerful on the entire sea. Rodar himself has always known the Gords for what they are—beasts, whose only purpose is conquest. While the Mirkans have always dwelled far enough away from the Gords—so we thought—to remain free of the contest, all who live along the Dark Sea long ago realized that, one day, the Gords would strike at Rodar. His kingdom has prided itself on decency and justice, while the Gords—"

Before the glass-eyed Mirkan could finish, a cheer from the soldiers burst raggedly through the noise of wind and sea. Brak and the other prisoners glanced up.

On the quarterdeck, the Gord admiral no longer wore an expression of fright. He was smiling, bowing forward a young woman who had emerged from the cabin in the stern's castle.

"That's the strangest sight of any yet," Brak said, his thick yellow brows pulling together. "A young girl on a warship."

The Mirkan alongside shuddered. "Not an ordinary girl, outlander. Her name—"

But the Gord soldiers were already chanting it:

"Ilona! Ilona! Ilona!"

THEY beat their spear-heads against their leathern shields. Brak recalled hearing frightened Mirkan men whisper the name in the burning streets. The young girl negotiated the tilting deck with ease. She moved to the rail. A peacock-hued cloak belled out from her shoulders. Beneath this a pearl-colored gown was pressed tight against her body by the wind. Her hair was yellow, like Brak's. Her face was comely, oval, red-lipped, the brows delicate. Her eyes were large and luminous as sapphires.

The girl lifted her pale white hands in a kind of benediction. The gesture seemed to quiet the soldiers, and lend the admiral confidence. But the Mirkan slaves in the pits quickly averted their heads.

"Many people said a woman called Ilona was with the Gords when they attacked," Brak whispered. "Who is she?"

"Their witch. Their sorceress. Don't look at her."

Despite the warning, Brak continued to study Ilona. To all outward appearances she was as

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fresh and attractive as a country bride. Yet the tiny smile on her mouth, the glow in her eyes as she stood with upraised hands, hinted otherwise.

An eerie crawling traced up Brak's naked spine. The witch Ilona pointed to the heavens, above the rattling, cracking sail. Already tendrils of the ebony stormcloud were whipping above the ship's frayed pennons. Ilona's lips moved, mumbling something. An incantation against the elements?

Brak continued to stare, fascinated. Ilona swayed. Her body went rigid. The Gord admiral watched the sky—

Abruptly, the tendrils of cloud that were sweeping down upon the seventy helter-skelter ships of the war-fleet began to curl back upon themselves, parting, ripping away to vapor, as though the storm had been stopped by a magical power.

The Gord soldiers began to beat their shields again. They cheered their good fortune.

Suddenly, from another of the galleys foundering along nearby, a sea-trumpet bleated. Then again. Its notes were like the wail of a frightened soul.

Ilona dropped her arms to her sides. She took a step backward. The admiral clutched the rail. One of the Mirkans two benches forward let out a cheer. The admiral seized a soldier's spear and, cursing, flung it out, hard.

The Mirkan took the spear in his belly. He pitched over backward with blood spilling from his middle and washing down his death-thrashing legs.

"In the name of the unseeable," Brak said, "what madness is on them?"

"Madness?" The voice of the prisoner beside him quaked. "Not madness, barbarian. Fear of revenge!"

WHIPPING his head around, Brak saw what the admiral, Ilona and the soldiers had sighted first.

A low, fast warship with a prow carved in the shape of a gryphon's head had come darting out of the total blackness of the stormcloud covering sea and sky in the north. From the ship's prow swayed a great cross-barred lantern radiating bluish light. Above the lantern, somehow managing to stand upright on the swaying figurehead, was a man, little more than a blur of gray robe and white beard.

Already the strange new ship, being much lighter, had passed several of the Gord galleys. It bore down upon the flagship.

"Kalkanoth!" sobbed the man beside Brak. "That is his sacred lantern, and there he stands! At least if we must die, then he will make certain many a Gord dies with us."

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Once more Brak was puzzled. "Who is it?" he shouted above the storm. "Some Mirkan general?"

"Our warlock! Kalkanoth, our sorcerer! He's old and wise enough in the magical arts to humble Ilona and this pack of butchers. Had Kalkanoth been in our city when the Gords struck, we would have had some chance to win. But he has been many months in the inland wilderness, alone, on a pilgrimage."

Now the Mirkan seemed almost hysterical with joy as he went on, "Clearly one of our people lived long enough to locate him, and guide him back. He has come, through the storm, on his own ship, to take revenge—"

Brak was not impressed. What was the arrival of the warlock but more futility? One tiny craft, one ancient wizard against seventy vessels, a young witch and a mammoth storm to boot? Brak shook his head as the flagship began to pitch violently again.

Hardly a rower moved now, nor a Gord overseer either. All were watching the strange new ship with its great lantern spreading bluish light ahead of it.

Powerful or not, Kalkanoth could do no more than destroy himself along with the Gords. That was hardly reassuring to Brak. The nightmare of the storm and the hopeless odds against the revenge-crazed warlock of the Mirkans could only result in a holocaust of death. A holocuast which would sweep Brak the barbarian—in chains—along with it.

Somehow, Kalkanoth remained standing on the figurehead as his craft drew within two lengths of the Gord flagship. The smaller vessel cut a path through foundering enemy ships. Here and there bowmen or spear-bearers threw their weapons at the speeding little gryphon-vessel, but the casts fell short.

Again Brak cursed. That he should be caught in this orgy of self-destruction, of hate-induced madness—it sickened him. What a pitiful spectacle it was! Kalkanoth was no more than a blur in the blowing storm-mist. His tattered gray robe flapped, his beard flew as he made meaningless, intricate patterns in the air with his old white hands.

ILONA stepped forward to grasp hold of the quarterdeck rail with her left hand. Her right hand was raised again, fashioned into a claw. She motioned with it, as though trying to draw something out of the blackening sky. Suddenly, down from the apex of the heavens where the ebony clouds were closing in, a clap of thunder boomed.

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The roar made Brak's head ache. His ears throbbed. Gord soldiers screamed. In the instant of their terrified crying, the whole sea lit up with the blaze of a bright scarlet streak of lightning.

Like a sword it smote down out of the darkness. The lightning-bolt struck the sea, burst into a ball of fire and steam.

Two benches ahead, a Mirkan was on his feet, foaming at the mouth, beating his fists against his oar.

"Kalkanoth will avenge us! Kalkanoth brings the dark powers!"

The Gord admiral hastily consulted with Ilona. He seized a bronze trumpet, shouted through it: "Have no fear! Ilona knows the secret ways of our enemy. His tricks are illusion. The storm makes it easy for him to conjure up spirit-demons. The celestial ether is disturbed, full of strange impulses. Ilona will banish his phantoms—"

Hysterical screaming from a nearby Gord vessel drowned him out. Brak gaped.

Awash of scarlet light suddenly came bubbling up out of the sea. And in the crown of light that covered the churning waves between the flagship and Kalkanoth's vessel, two great baleful eyes in a gigantic scaled head appeared—

Then a dripping, slimy body high as a galley's rail and twice as long. The apparition rose from the Dark Sea with ten lashing forks in its tail and immense webbed fore- and hind-claws. Towering far above the flagship, it seemed to claw its way along the water without touching the surface.

Another crackling streak of red lightning split the sky. Another. Another. With each burst a new, incredible *thing* took shape out of the sea—

Here reared a wing-shaped monster with one staring eye in its round head; there, a creature materialized that was no more than a writhing mass of sucking tentacles twice as long as the highest Gord mast. Like evil flowers the creatures bloomed from the sea's surface on every hand. Brak bit his lip until he tasted blood.

On the flagship quarterdeck, Ilona's claw-shaped hands convulsed, opening. The tips of her fingers spit little hissing lines of white radiance. But her face was a mask of rage and despair.

In the oar-pits, the Mirkan prisoners began to tear savagely at their chains. Gord soldiers ran for the rail, moaning in terror. Vainly the admiral cried through his trumpet:

"Be calm! They are mind-phantoms! Ilona knows—she will dispel them!"

Ilona tore the trumpet from

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his hands, cupped it to her mouth. Her voice was a thin wail as she vainly tried to restore order to the scene:

"I cannot fight alone! I cannot dispel them unless the power of your minds will aid me. Believe they're phantoms! They are, they are! You must believe it! Your thoughts must cry out that Kalkanoth's demons are false, that they will vanish before your eyes if—"

ILONA's words cut off abruptly as a contingent of Gord seamen from the quarterdeck rushed past her, knocking her against the rail. One after another, the seamen leaped overboard. They preferred watery death to the approach of the lizard-like head, all red-shiny, that was craning down upon the flagship from above.

Brak's mind could not calmly absorb so much horror, so many unthinkable ten-armed, five-headed, tentacled things. One moment they seemed insubstantial as fog. He could see through them. Then they would solidify again.

Waves broke higher over the flagship, higher still. The air around Brak was turning to scarlet mist. Ship after ship, foundering without rowers, was going down. Afar off now, Kalkanoth's blue lantern still burned.

In the oar-pits more screaming broke out when the baleful eyes of the lizard-thing dipped down between the masts. Oarsmen threw themselves into hideous convulsions to escape the all-too-real phantoms with which Kalkanoth was gaining his revenge. The oar to which Brak was chained snapped in half. One end lashed around, impaled the Mirkan who had been fettered next to him. The splintered shaft pierced the man's chest, emerged from his back.

The big barbarian was on his feet in a tangle of bodies and blood. He pulled frantically at his own chains when he realized that his wrist-links were broken away from the shattered oar. Beneath his feet the deck planks were cracking apart as the flagship rolled dangerously.

Brak scrambled over the tangle of foam-lipped prisoners. He charged for the rail. A hand gripped his naked shoulder. Brak whirled.

A Gord overseer, mindless with fear and the urge to strike back, lifted his short-sword to cleave Brak's skull.

The barbarian crouched, snapped his right hand forward. The broken end of his wrist chain struck the overseer between the eyes, shattered flesh and bone. The man dropped, his eyesockets erupting with gore.

Instinctively Brak reached out, caught the man's short-

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sword. As his fingers closed on the haft, there was sanity in him again. For with a weapon, small as it was, he felt less helpless.

AS he started for the rail, a misty red claw, six times as wide as a man, coiled over the rail's edge from below. The claw was real and yet not real. Brak turned. He preferred to try another route of escape, rather than plunge through part of the body of the monster whose great head waved above the snapping masts.

The big barbarian scrambled over rioting, mindless men who tore at one another, friend and foe alike. At last he gained the quarterdeck. There he saw an open bit of rail again. Beyond lay the sea, where a hundred horror-creatures writhed among wrecked ships.

He plunged ahead, yellow braid streaming out behind him. A squat, round-eyed thing that had been a man stumbled into his path. The admiral.

Brak dodged aside. The admiral mewed and moaned, dimly recognized a tangible enemy. He drew back his spear to drive it through Brak's belly.

The barbarian jumped aside. But not fast enough. The spearhead ripped his thigh, drawing blood.

Brak thrust out with his right arm. The short-sword gutted the admiral through the bowels. As the dead man fell away, Brak froze.

Clinging to the lashing wheel was the witch Ilona.

Tears of hate, of defeat streamed on her cheeks. For one awful instant her luminous eyes focused on Brak, on Brak alone out of all those who were the enemy.

Her garments were soaked. She looked old and bent despite her youth. But for that long moment, she looked upon the face of Brak the barbarian, who had slain a Gord admiral, and she made his face a part of her memory of the defeat she had suffered.

Her lips jerked. Her hand lifted, palsied, as though she meant to curse him. Brak stared, shuddering. The instant was long as eternity—

Before Ilona could cry out, a wave thundered over the quarterdeck. The force of the wave knocked Brak through the air, splintering wood, carrying Ilona away, whirling the world in confusion.

He struck the sea with cruel force. He twisted over and over, fought his way to the surface. His thigh throbbed. His chest burned. He felt pitifully weak. The admiral's spear had gouged too deeply.

All around, men and wreckage drifted. The men were as shat-

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tered as the remains of the ships.

All around, the great vessels of the Gord fleet sank. The monsters of Kalkanoth faded away to mist. Of the warlock's gryphon-vessel there was no sign.

But the damage was done. The Gord fleet was destroyed. As Brak swam, he heard the rush and roar of the flagship going down behind him.

Even the sky was growing lighter. Brak saw the coastline a great distance off.

But the waves were high. His arms ached as he pulled himself through the water.

He knew he would not make the shore.

Then he knew nothing at all.

Chapter II

SWIRLS of orange light beat against Brak's eyelids.

He was conscious of a slow, pulsing pain in his leg. The pain numbed his whole body.

He fought to open his eyes. His hands closed into angry fists, tangling in a wine-colored woolen coverlet upon which he lay. The lion-hide garment was still wrapped about his middle. Otherwise there was no familiar reference point. It was as though he had emerged from a pit of total forgetfulness into a place of sulphurous light; a place where a grotesque, elongated shadow convulsed on a tapestried wall, bending toward him like some gate-keeper of the Underworld—

"The shore," Brak croaked, dizzy. "The shore is too far. I remember—"

He stopped, gaping. He remembered it all, including the lashing of the waves, and his conviction that he was fated to die in the Dark Sea. All at once, the scene around him sharpened.

It was no misty entrance-chamber to Hell. The mist was all in his eyes, and clearing. The sulphurous glare was the flicker of an oil lamp on a pearl-inlaid taboret. The shadow on the wall of the commodious bedchamber was a trick of lamplight. The shadow belonged to a slender, gentle-faced young woman with auburn hair down to her waist. The girl wore a spotless white gown and was bending over Brak.

"Can you hear me at last, stranger?"

"Aye."

"For nearly a month I've watched, waiting for you to come back to your senses."

"A month?" Brak scratched his head. "Who are you? What is this place?"

The girl smiled, though not without a trace of apprehension. Probably this was the result of his appearance, Brak guessed. Half-naked, the big barbarian all but hid the pallet on which he

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lay, so huge was his frame. There was clean linen bound around his thigh where—he remembered it—the Gord admiral's spear had dug deeply.

"I am Saria," the girl said. "Perhaps my father and Calix should explain the rest."

As the girl moved gracefully toward the doorway hangings, Brak sat up. He grimaced. Pain stabbed down his leg again.

"Is your father one of the Gord people, girl?"

Ugly and tense in the lamplight, Brak's face frightened her, stilled the reply on her lips. She merely shook her head. Then she was gone in a rustle of hanging silks.

Brak scowled. He stood a bit unsteadily. He stretched, glanced around the large, airy chamber.

A high window embrasure revealed a patch of stardusted sky. Through the window drifted street noises, the creak of a wheeled cart. The sounds were vaguely comforting. Had the battle on the Dark Sea been an evil dream?

Brak knew it had not. He bore the wound in his flesh as a token of that ghastly encounter. He bore the memory of the sorceress Ilona's eyes remembering his face.

VOICES murmured on the far side of the hangings. Quickly the curtains were swept aside. Into the chamber strode a man of middle years and medium height. He was clad in a costly green robe whose hem was stitched in gold thread, in a repeated pattern of the balance-scales of the market place. The man wore a short beard, gray-shot. His general appearance was kindly.

Behind, in the simple gray tunic of a freedman, came a second man. He was younger, with curly red hair, startlingly bright blue eyes and well-muscled arms. In contrast to the swarthy looks of the older man in the emerald robe, the freedman's coloring was light. Circassian, Brak guessed.

The bearded man paused a safe distance from Brak. "I am Phonicios. This is my house."

"My name is Brak. I gather I owe you a debt. But what sort of debt still puzzles me."

Phonicios studied him. "We are equally puzzled. You are not a Mirkan. Neither are you one of the Gords. Yet we found you—rather, my steward Calix discovered you—" A small ruby on Phonicios's right hand glittered as he indicated the freedman. "—lying on the shingle of the Dark Sea, unconscious, the night after the great battle of the ships. That was almost a month ago. Since then you have dreamed and raved endlessly. Many times we thought you would die. We

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had the devil's own time feeding you by force, I might add."

"How did you happen to come upon me on the coast, steward?" Brak asked.

Calix smiled easily. "My master had sent me on a mission. My first impulse was to leave you where you lay. But the chains on your wrists and ankles convinced me you hadn't been aboard the Gord ships out of choice. So I loaded you into the chariot and brought you here, for Lord Phonocios to deal with. Lucky for you that the chief of the Merchant Guild has a tender-hearted daughter."

Here Calix glanced warmly at the girl Saria. She returned his gaze for an instant with equal warmth, then glanced away, flushing. Calix went on, wryly:

"I'd not have sat with you all this time, stranger. As far as I'm concerned, you have the look of trouble about you."

Phonicios frowned. "Don't judge him thus simply because he's an outlander, Calix. Mind your tongue."

Reassured that he was among friendly people, Brak managed a smile. "An outlander I am indeed, lord Phonicios. My name is Brak. More often than not, strangers call me a barbarian because, in the high steppes where I was born, our dress and manners are not so elegant as here in these civilized lands. I was a prisoner on the Gord flagship, and—but before I tell that tale, I have one question. Where is this house? I mean, in what city?"

PULLING up a stool, Phonicios poured wine from a silver amphora and gestured for Brak to drink.

"This is the city-state ruled by Rodar, Prince of the Two Bays." Phonicios scowled. "Would the Prince were here to protect us, instead of that bumbling vizier who will lead us like lambs into the jaws of the Gords before he's done."

"Rodar," Brak murmured, brows together. "I recall now. We saw the city from shipboard."

"And our lookouts," put in Saria, "saw the conflict on the sea from the coastal watch-tower. Awful red fires—frightful creatures rising from the waves." The girl's slender yet womanly figure shuddered lightly. "The tales of it terrified the city."

"As well they might," Brak said low. "I have seen demons aplenty in my time. But never any so large as those conjured up in the battle between the witch and the old man on the ship with the blue lantern hanging from its prow. But I owe you my story in the right order. Let me have another pull at the wine, and a hunk of this bread too,

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first. Then all I'll need to be myself again is a sword. The Gords took mine from me."

So saying, Brak tore off nearly half of a butt of dark wheat-loaf lying beside the amphora. He wolfed it with great hungry munching noises. Phonicios and Calix exchanged half-amused, half-wary looks. Saria retreated to the far side of the chamber, safely out of range on a low divan.

Rapidly Brak told them about himself, plus something of his travels as he journeyed southward to seek his fortune in the warmer climes of Khurdisan. He related being caught in the surprise sacking of the Mirkan port, and the events up until he lost consciousness in the water.

"I must have paddled the full distance to shore," he concluded, "though in a mindless state, for I recall nothing."

During the narrative Phonicios had grown more and more agitated. Now he leaped up.

"Barbarian, there's one favor I would ask in return for the charity of this house. Grant it, and I'll even replace your lost broadsword."

Brak's eyes grew somber. "Ask it. I owe you much. My very life, I think."

Phonicios looked concerned. "I want you to accompany me to the palace as soon as you are strong enough. I want you to relate your tale to the vizier. Worthless as Mustaf ben Medi may be, still it's my duty as a citizen of the City of Two Bays to give him any piece of intelligence which may come my way. Our lookouts, as my daughter said, watched the sea battle from afar. Not a vessel survived. Yet individual members of the enemy party may have reached safety, as you did. Your story of the power of the sorceress Ilona is the first concrete word we have had that the Gords possess such magical strengths. Rumors of this we have heard, true. But no one has ever seen the witch work her wonders. If she still lives—"

Brak shook his head. "Not likely, in that storm. But possible. Why your concern?"

"Because," replied Phonicios, "Prince Rodar this very moment is on the nearby frontier of the realm. With the small army we maintain he is preparing for a possible invasion by the Gords via the land route. The ships that sank represented only a fraction of the might of the Gords. If, somehow, the witch Ilona survived and has joined the Gords on land, then I would say that all the Gord fighting men who drowned counted for nothing. We must warn Rodar."

CALIX the freedman stepped forward. "The people of this city-state, barbarian, will die for

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Rodar if need be. But preparing to fight against magical incantations is another matter."

Once more Brak tilted the amphora, warmed by the wine. "Of course I'll go with you, lord Phonocios. Perhaps if the Gords manage to link up with Ilona again, being forewarned would be a wise precaution." Momentarily memories of the scarlet mist sea demons danced in his brain. "Though knowing what is expected is hardly the same as seeing the witch-woman's tricks for yourself. Still, I suppose every bit of information may be of value to your prince."

Briskly Phonicios nodded, rose. "We shall retire now, lest we tire you. Rest well tonight, barbarian. Perhaps on the morrow you'll be strong enough to accompany me."

Brak gave a nod. "I will, lord." He smiled. "And my thanks to all of you."

Phonicios, his daughter and his steward left the chamber. But not before Brak caught one more bit of by-play:

The steward reached over, pressed the girl's hand behind the father's back. Amused, Brak sank down on the pallet. He yawned, rolled over.

How long he would remain in the city of Rodar, Prince of the Two Bays, he did not know. But it would certainly be long enough to repay the leader of the Merchant Guild for his generosity and kindness.

TOWARD noon of the next day, Brak rose, feeling fit enough to walk about. Beside his pallet lay a new, well-tempered broadsword half-protruding from a sheath of beaten bronze. Clearly it was a gift from his generous host.

After a huge meal brought in on salvers by Phonicios's servants, Brak set out through the streets of the city with the bearded merchant.

The buildings of Rodar's dominion were stately and tall, washed in mild sunshine. People thronged in the bazaars and public squares. They were seemingly oblivious to the fact that their prince was preparing to defend their lives at the border. Between the buildings down the broad, crowded avenues Brak glimpsed the two large bays on which the mole fronted. Between the bays the craggy island rose up to bisect a vista of the Dark Sea, lead-colored and sun-dappled.

Everywhere people greeted Phonicios with deference, leading Brak to the conclusion that being leader of the Merchant Guild of this prosperous city was a position of considerable importance. A few of the greeters, however, seemed to wear false smiles, and Phonicios was not especially cordial in replying to

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them. The reason for this Brak did not understand.

For the gigantic barbarian with his yellow braid, lion-tailed cloud and broadsword hanging at his hip the inhabitants had only stares of wonderment.

Presently the two men reached a square larger than any seen before. Directly opposite the entry avenue there was a vast, gracefully-columned temple. On either side of the temple were two towering idols, higher than the highest building. Brak marvelled at the intricacy of the carvings on the bronze statues. Phonicios pointed to the temple.

"Yonder, Brak, is our holy of holies, where the Sacred Lamb Fleece hangs. The Fleece has been the symbol of our freedom since beyond the memory of man. Some say the gods gave it to our first prince. Should the Fleece ever be destroyed or captured, I fear the city would fall."

"No doubt the Gords would like to get their hands on it."

"True, true."

"I'm interested in your gods, lord Phonicios. They're strange to me."

PAUSING in the middle of the crowded square, Phonicios made a broad gesture to take in the left-hand idol. Like its opposite, it towered twenty times as tall as Brak himself. The statue was that of a woman, full bodied and without a garment except for a girdle of modesty at her brazen waist.

"We worship two gods here, Brak. She is Ashtir, our lady of goodness and fruitfulness. Notice the great wheels at her base? Her image can be moved by an ingenious arrangement of internal pulleys and weights controlled from a chamber up there inside her head. She is taken to the fields at planting time, you see, to bless the crops. She is a kind goddess. But she is not the deity who receives the most attention." Phonicios swung around. "Jaal does."

Phonicios's voice had dropped low. He made a cabalistic sign, perhaps in reverence to the other gigantic statue. It was man-shaped, with great bronze-cast thews and muscles. But its skin was scale-like. In its metal forehead was one great, staring bronze eye that watched the square below.

"Jaal the Leveller," Phonocios repeated. "More demon than man. It is Ashtir the people love. But it is Jaal the Leveller to whom they burn offerings. He is the god of misfortune. He alone can bring us to ruin."

Brak could not suppress a shudder at the sight of the mammoth, evilly-shaped idol leering down from on high. Resuming their walk, he and Phonicios passed near the idol's base. Brak

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saw that what the merchant had said was true. Lamb and goat carcasses were heaped in profusion on an altar, and ritual fires smoldered between Jaal's feet. Several dozen people were prostrated before the god, praying for his favor. When these moved on, others took their places.

As Brak and Phonicios walked briskly down another wide avenue, Brak understood for the first time the significance of the relatively smaller idols he had seen in niches on countless street corners. The idols were gray stone versions of Jaal the Leveller, about as tall as Brak himself. All had that never-closing cyclopean eye which watched, almost in evil amusement, the activities of the puny humans who passed before it.

Climbing a flight of several hundred marble steps, Brak and his benefactor were soon inside the imposing palace. They got as far as the royal antechamber, a place with a ceiling of gold leaf and a heavy scent of incense. They were stopped by an effeminate seneschal carrying a tall ivory wand.

The seneschal barred their path at the high open doors through which Brak glimpsed a throne. Upon the throne lounged a man of white complexion and huge belly. He was talking in shrill tones with several military men in armor.

"It is of great importance that we speak with vizier ben Medi," said Phonicios. "This man Brak has a tale to tell which may be of value to Prince Rodar on the frontier."

The seneschal glanced suspiciously at Brak. "This lout? He looks incapable of coherent speech. Phonicios, the vizier has many weighty matters upon his mind. He can't trifle with—"

The seneschal stopped, swallowed as Brak stepped forward. The barbarian said low, "I may not wear pretty robes, courtier, but my speech is coherent enough to say that another insult from your painted mouth will get you a broken neck."

Quickly the seneschal raised his hands. "Peace. Peace, stranger! Speak your news."

RAPIDLY Phonicios told the story. Brak interjected a comment here and there. The seneschal gnawed his lip, shrugged.

"Wait here."

He hurried into the throne room. Phonicios rolled his eyes heavenward. The seneschal interrupted Mustaf ben Medi, whispered to him. The vizier, whose cheeks were purple-mottled like those of a confirmed voluptary, began to shout and gesture violently.

As the soldiers in the throne room looked on with displeasure

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the seneschal hurried back out. He drew the great doors shut behind him.

"You heard," he murmured with another shrug. "That the Gords plan a land invasion is hardly news to the vizier. That they may employ a witch to aid them hardly falls into the category of useful military intelligence. Mustaf bids you bring him word in the future of real, not imaginary, dangers which threaten the city. The prince will take care of the frontier. The responsibilities of guarding the people here are what concern the vizier, and he is too busy to deal with anything else."

Phonicios lifted a contemptuous shoulder. "Come, Brak. We'll waste no more time."

Angrily Brak said, "But the skills of that witch could frighten your people into surrender, or worse. If she lives, and if she should strike this city—

"Have you any proof that she lives?" the seneschal interrupted. "Bring that if you do! Bring specific information about how our citizens may combat these demons you say she can conjure up! Then Mustaf will receive you. Until then, he cannot be troubled."

"Ineffectual oaf," Phonicios muttered, turning away. "Perhaps we'd all better burn another offering to Jaal. It's clear we haven't burned enough thus far —we've been cursed with the protection of a man who is an addlepated winebibber."

With another glare that set the effeminate seneschal trembling, Brak followed Phonicios out.

As the two men neared the hallway that led to the great front portal of the palace, Phonicios paused.

"This way, Brak. I know of a quicker way out of this den of stupidity. Let's take it. The stink of cowardice is gagging in my throat."

WITHOUT comment, Brak loped along behind Phonicios. Soon they emerged from a portal which opened onto a long colonnade. Dim sunlight filtered between the pillars. The place was chill.

Phonicios railed against Mustaf under his breath as they rushed along. A figure in a tattered, cowled cloak was approaching along the colonnade. Brak paid no notice until Phonicios pulled up short in the shadow of a pillar. The merchant was pale.

"I chose the wrong way after all. This is turning out to be a black day."

The man approaching had seen the pair, stopped. For a moment sunlight illuminated his face under the shabby cowl. It was a face Brak liked not at all, thin,

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sallow, with a scraggly wisp of black beard hanging from the point of his chin. The man looked unwashed, down-at-the-heels. He had peculiarly long, narrow gray eyes. Surprisingly, the stranger smiled. But it was a smile of the surface only, insincere and repellant.

The stranger nodded toward Brak. "Has the esteemed leader of the Merchant Guild taken to going about with bodyguards?"

"Stand out of my way, Huz," said Phonicios. "Our business is finished."

"No, not by half," said the other. To Brak: "I gather, stranger, that you must be a bully hired by lord Phonicios because he fears for his life. As well he might. In case you don't recognize me, my name is Huz al Hussayn. I am the man whom the great Phonicios here must have hired you to look out for. Well, I assure you, I won't strike with a sword."

"You'll not strike at all, Phonicios growled. "Your dismissal from the Guild—"

"—was a farce!" Huz al Hussayn said. "A conspiracy directed by you."

"Do you deny that you engaged in sharp practices which disgraced the Guild?" Phonicios roared.

"I deny it completely. I deny it because you cannot prove it. You merely told the fine, fat Guild members of your suspicions. The sanctimonious fools took you at your word."

Huz stepped closer, wagged a long, saffron-colored finger with a long broken nail under Phonicios's chin.

"I may have cheated in my time. But I paid my share of dinshas to the Guild like the rest of you, and you had no right to dismiss me; to send me scurrying along the back stairs of the palace in search of jobs worth a pittance. To be cast out in disgrace is not something which I'll take lightly, Phonicios. This is the first time I've had a chance to say it to your face. You were too cowardly and hypocritical to confront me alone. You needed the Guild at your back. But since we have met, I can promise you'll regret your action."

PHONICIOS'S temple bulged where an angry vein stood out. "Get out of my way, scum."

Huz al Hussayn shook his head. "Not until you hear what I have in store as punishment."

Disgusted, Phonocios seized the cloaked arm of Huz al Hussayn to draw him out of the way. Brak's fingers dropped toward the haft of his broadsword. Clearly there was trouble a-brewing. Hate smoldered in the dismissed Guild member's eyes.

"I warn you to stand out of

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the way," Phonicios said tightly. "If you don't pay heed—"

"We'll see who pays heed to whom!" Huz ripped free of Phonicios's grip. The cowled man's arm flashed back, then down. His fist caught Phonicios in the side of the head, knocking him back against the carved pillar.

Phonicios groaned, stumbled. Huz darted forward, breathing rapidly. His cowl fell away. In the dim sunlight filtering into the deserted colonnade, his long black hair shone with myrrh-gum. It was tied at the nape with a strip of rag, and gleamed like a condor's wing.

Brak still hesitated as Huz darted forward, brought his leg upward, bent at the knee, for a vicious blow at Phonicios's middle. Huz, it turned out, was a somewhat younger man than he looked at first. Phonocios was no match for him. Brak whipped out the broadsword, a flash of cold metal in the wan light of the long arcade.

"No!" Phonicios was gasping, doubled in pain. "No, barbarian! I am no coward, to have—others fight my—battles with vermin like—"

"I've already fallen far enough as a result of your hypocricy!" Huz screamed, fastening his hands on Phonicios's throat. He dug his long, cracked fingernails deeply into the older man's flesh. "I won't tolerate more of your filthy abuse, you walking dung-heap!"

Clod! Brak shouted to himself. *Don't stand like an ox because Phonicios is too proud to ask for help—*

Phonicios clutched at the hands tormenting his throat. In that moment Brak moved, raising his broadsword.

The head of Huz al Hussayn was half-turned. His eyes caught the flicker of movement. Brak was four or five paces from the scuffling men. Before he could close the distance, Huz had let go.

Phonicios sagged. Huz whirled around, cloak belling like evil wings. As Brak raised the broadsword to smite Huz on the skull with the flat of it, he stopped suddenly.

The dismissed merchant was actually laughing!

Laughing softly, to himself, and mumbling incoherently, mumbling phrases in a strange, guttural tongue—

Perhaps he and Phonicios were dealing with a man who had lost his sanity. Brak charged in with broadsword raised. Huz's laugh rang out, sharp. He clapped his hands.

WHERE the darkness came from, Brak never knew. Outside the colonnade the sun still shone on crowded streets. Yet be-

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tween him and the cowled, crack-nailed man, a pearly-black oiliness seemed to coalesce from the very air.

Phonicios held his throat, retching in fear. Between Huz and Brak the darkness deepened, twisting, writhing, filled with weird purple highlights. Brak's jaw dropped. Fear knotted his belly. The blackness boiled and twisted into human shape.

A black, smoky face leered at him. Smoke-hands whipped through the air toward his head. Between those hands hung something thin, something wraith-like, strung with black pearls, ghostly black pearls faintly touched with blood-drops—

A rope! Brak's mind screamed. *A rope of smoke held by a shadow-strangler—*

Brak almost thought he heard the smoke-shape chuckling. Perhaps it was Huz. Suddenly there were points of excruciating pain in his throat.

The phantom rope with its pearls of knots was around his windpipe.

The smoke-shape swirled in front of his face, real and yet not real, bringing a brimstone smell into the dim colonnade.

Tighter the ghostly knots sank into Brak's throat.

Tighter.

The world tilted, swam out of focus.

Desperately Brak drew his broadsword arm back. He wrenched it downward with all his power.

The blade whistled clean through smoky stuff that parted instantly, whipped away into shreds. Behind the wraith there was nothing, except a thick pillar against which Brak's blade rang loudly, violently, sending off a shower of blue sparks, a hiss.

Silence.

Brak whirled around. The smoke was gone. The foul pit-smell still lingered. Huz al Hussayn was fleeing down the arcade. His voice floated back:

"That is only a taste, my gentle friends. A taste—and more to come!"

He disappeared around the end of the colonnade.

Gaping, Brak rubbed his throat. "I felt—I felt the knots. I saw a face. But there was—*nothing*."

Phonicios staggered forward, ashen. "And I. The face was real, Brak. I recognized it."

Brak felt cold perspiration running on his chest. "Real?" he repeated.

"It was the face of a criminal who was infamous in this city. A man known for strangling with a knotted rope. A man named Yem." Phonicios clutched Brak's arm. "A man caught by the night watch, gutted with a spear and—and buried months ago."

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Brak looked down the colonnade. He shuddered again.

"Somehow, lord Phonicios, the man Huz has brought the strangler back from the dead. Somehow, your enemy is not just an enemy of flesh any longer. He has specters on his side. And—"

Brak's voice became a whisper hardly heard:

"And sorcery."

Chapter III

PRESENTLY a sense of the normal returned to the long colonnade with its marble floor patterned by pale sun-stripes falling between the pillars. Brak rammed his broadsword back into the sheath of bronze hanging from his waist. Phonicios had recovered somewhat. He even managed a wan smile as he gave a tug to his gray-shot beard.

"Well, my barbarian friend, I suppose we can thank the gods that our carcasses still hinge together properly."

Brak's eyes glinted as he rubbed his throat.

"My neck feels like it's been gouged by human thumbs, not phantom ones. Tell me, Lord Phonicios. Surely there are no marks to be seen."

The quickly-averted eyes of the merchant told otherwise. Barely murmuring, he answered, "The signs are real enough. There are deep red gouges."

Slowly Brak looked first one direction, then another along the colonnade.

"Let us put this place of shadows behind us, lord Phonicios. I've encountered demons in my travels, and men who were masters of them. But what spirits I've seen summoned were mostly things of the mind, like Ilona's sea-creatures. Never was a mark left on the body by one of them. What sting they possessed they somehow delivered through the mind of the one who saw them."

Phonicios guided Brak to the colonnade's end. "True, Brak. Most phantoms do their work in our imagination. Perhaps they even have their being wholly in our minds, who can say? But the ghost of the killer Yem is a different sort. His rope of smoke can slay."

They emerged from the colonnade and started down broad steps into the comforting clamor of the public thoroughfares. Clouds were moving in from the westward. Behind them the sun was a sharply-defined white disk. The day grew oppressive, the air damp and still. Among the merchants and customers jostling in colorful booths and pavilions, good humor was supplanted by a certain shrillness.

Phonicios paused at a junction of two avenues.

"Perhaps I spoke foolishly when I said we were lucky, Brak.

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Whole in body we may be. But that keeps us targets for Huz when he chooses to strike again." The merchant pulled a face. "What an ignoramus I am! Speaking as though you were a member of my household. I thank you for assisting me, but this is not your quarrel."

"I think it is now, lord. Huz chose to attack me as well."

Phonicios stared at the barbarian's bleak face. A hostler, coming along with a string of pack mules whose traces jingled with little brass bells, turned to watch a maid in the crowd. He collided with the big barbarian. Brak was standing still as stone, staring over the rooftops at nothing, as though remembering the face of Huz.

"Ill-mannered churl—!" began the hostler.

BRAK merely glanced down, frowned. His eyes were like thunder. The hostler turned white, snatched his cap off his head, opened his mouth to mutter apologies. He thought better of it, jerked his mules to one side and rushed on.

"You gave me back my life, lord," Brak said to Phonicios, "you and your daughter and your steward Calix. For a month, nearly, the lady Saria watched over me. I have yet to invest even a full day's time in exchange. I will not leave Prince Rodar's city until I have given a month in your service, a month and as much more as it requires to pay for the saving of a life. Now," Brak finished, closing his fingers around his broadsword-haft, "let us find where this Huz hides, and settle with him."

Phonicios shook his head ruefully. "To do so is as easy as finding a single droplet in a typhoon."

"Then at least tell me something more of him, and of this dead man, Yem."

"I will. Come, let's take this avenue. There, beyond that distant gate, is a place which will explain much of Yem, and also some other things which have only just now fallen together in my mind, like the pieces of a broken mosaic."

Brak followed where Phonicios led, straining to see past the gate. "What lies outside?"

"The burial-grounds."

Once more a mantle of gloom wrapped around Brak. But he followed Phonicios with no hesitation in his stride, tall and brawny, standing taller in fact than most men they passed. Brak watched the stalls and booths warily as they moved along the thoroughfare. While his eyes were busy searching for signs of an enemy, his mind was busy absorbing Phonicios's tale:

"Substantially all you heard from the lips of Huz himself is

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true, Brak. Of course he colored it. There was no hypocricy in the dismissal vote of the Guild. I sponsored that vote, yes. But we cast our ivory cubes into the teakwood box in open assembly. Assembly at which Huz, I might add, was present. We gave Huz leave to counter specific charges. He denied not one. Only laughed and called us star-crazed old men. Not worthy of arguing with. But I repeat—he did not deny a thing."

"What was his business?" Brak wanted to know. "And his chief offense?"

"To answer the first—seller of the carpets of Jaffnia. To answer the second I would need several turns of the hour-glass. His so-called Jaffnia carpets were not imported by caravan at all. They were loomed in the stews of this very city, cheaply. Parchments of authentication were carefully forged. Somehow he came by a seal-ring of the Jaffnian tent making guild. He used this to concot his documents. But he also dealt in raw wine laced with water, and solid bronze that was mere trumpery plating. Indeed, he dealt in dozens of dishonestly crafted commodities. True, each offense individually was petty enough. Typical human chicanery. But complaints mounted. Finally, a young bridegroom who had purchased one of Huz's Jaffnia beauties at great price discovered the forgery. The young man's cousin was himself in the Jaffnian tent guilt. Huz's victim knew something of the craft. So the young man brought charges before the Guild. He promised to accuse Huz al Hussayn publicly. He was last seen drinking wine at an inn which Huz himself occasionally visited. Then the young man dropped from sight, never to be heard from again. The clamor to remove Huz grew so great that the Guild at last acted on its own authority."

TAKING in these details, Brak suddenly noticed that they had passed through the gate at the city wall. They were travelling along a twisted road which suddenly rounded some high boulders and opened on either side onto rolling ground. Brak shivered.

The day had grown even darker. The mist was heavier. There was a peculiar odor in the air. Carved stone monuments in the burial ground towered up into the dim sky.

"This way," Phonicios said, leading Brak off among the cairns and strangely-shaped headstones. "That is, if you can bear to tread among the dead. Many others did, a short while back. See, some of their foot prints are still left."

So Brak noticed. The damp ground bore the faint impres-

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sions of sandals and naked feet, great numbers of them, not fresh, but not so old as to have disappeared. Phonicios paused beside a mound of raw rust-colored earth whose upper edge was marked with a small, poor stone. Upon the stone were carved the letters *Yem*.

"The corpse of the strangler vanished from this public burial-plot but three weeks ago. None knew why. But even then, there were tales that there was sorcery involved."

"My wits are too thick," Brak said. "Why should one empty grave attract gaping crowds?"

"Not one empty grave," replied Phonicios. "Two. A second body was stolen within days of the first. Let us walk a little further on."

Soon they reached another, similar heap of recently-turned earth. There was a declevity at its head. It was clear that a stone had been stolen.

"The curio hunters carried the stone off, no doubt," said Phonicios. "The name carved upon it was a name that caused many men to tremble—even though it was no real name at all. Here was buried the man they called The Thief-Taker."

"An informer? I have heard of men who practiced the trade, and were called thus."

"Aye, an informer. A vicious, evil-hearted man. Finally murdered by the very friends among the criminal element from whose betrayal he gained a livelihood. He was worse in many ways than Yem, they say. True, Yem killed. But straightforwardly, if there is such a thing where the taking of human life is concerned. The Thief-Taker, on the other hand, was cruelly devious. And lustful as a he-goat. In fact, those were his two overwhelming passions—a lust to do evil, and a lust for women. Most of the time his craving for women was the stronger passion. It helped make him notorious. When he saw a young maid, he couldn't rest until he'd despoiled her. But his other passion for evil brought him to this grave."

A MOMENT passed in stillness. Still Brak puzzled at it: "And grave robbers did this?"

"That is the question I am asking myself. So said everyone. So I too believed, until we saw that—that *thing* which was once Yem in the colonnade. Suddenly I wondered whether Huz has somehow allied himself with the dark powers. If Yem the Strangler was brought out of the earth for a purpose—then might not The Thief-Taker have been raised for the same purpose?"

"To take revenge," Brak nodded, understanding.

A loon went flapping and crying away between the head-

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stones. The strange, nauseating odor in the air had grown thicker. Phonocios suppressed a shudder, saying:

"Perhaps it's merely my old man's mind raising devils where none exist. Yet facts must be faced. Yem and The Thief-Taker did not disappear from their graves until after Huz was dismissed from the Guild, shortly after Calix carried you unconscious to my house. And then there was Onar."

"Who was Onar?"

"A good friend, and a member of the Guild also. He was murdered in his bed. Strangled with a knotted cord a fortnight ago. All—all, I say—assumed thieves did the deed. Knotted rope is a fairly common weapon in this part of the world. But Brak—after what we saw today—I wonder whether it might have been the ghost of Yem."

The big barbarian shook his yellow-braided head again, as if to clear it of troubling thoughts.

"I am no savant, lord Phonicios. Nor am I skilled in fighting shades. This—" He slapped his broadsword sheath. "—this is what I understand. Yet if your life is threatened, by human enemies or hell-things alike, my sword is yours until the danger passes."

About to say that the responsibility was not Brak's, Phonicios thought better of it. The same skull-gaunt look of anger that had frightened the hostler lay on Brak's features again. With feeling the older man said:

"Thank you, Brak. It is some comfort to know that Huz may not hold all the lucky dice after all. Well, I think we have seen enough here. Follow me. I know a route to the postern which will shorten our return to my house."

They re-crossed the road walked upward over a rise. There, Phonicios paused. At once the stink in the air grew more powerful. Brak saw its source.

BELOW, spreading into the mist were scores of funeral-stones taller, more impressive than those they had just quitted. The monuments were shaped into the forms of awful taloned, winged, many-beaked or many-headed creatures, underworld-things who stood guard over the departed. Scattered among the closely packed monuments were round puddles of fiery light, molten liquid that hissed and belched, bubble after sulphurous bubble. The smell arose from these pools, and their yellow radiance flickered in the mist, bathing the sides of the monuments in a ghastly glow.

"The Sulphur Fields," Phonicios explained. "Hold your nose and we'll pass through quickly. Although this ground is not nor-

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mally open to the public, the priests rarely appear in daylight."

"Priests?" echoed Brak as he followed Phonicios around one of the fire-puddles. Its heat singed the hairs on his great legs. A bubble broke on the surface with a wet, sucking pop. Gaseous fumes whirled around them. "Where do the priests hide, lord? In the tombs?"

"Underground. The poor of the Two Bays are merely buried. The rich are burnt to holy ash. Under the Sulphur Fields lie the city's official crematoriums. As a matter of fact, my steward Calix was once apprenticed to the priesthood which maintains the burial fires down below."

Nimbly Brak jumped around another fire-pool. Phonicios stumbled and nearly toppled into the red-shot liquidness. Brak leaped forward, caught him. After Brak had steadied the older man a moment, and Phonicios's gasps subsided, the pair moved on. Brak asked:

"How is it that a man with Calix's quick, lively temper would join a holy order which cares for the dead? Your steward doesn't strike me as the pale priestly type."

"Calix was of a genuinely religious turn of mind for a time. But he soon found himself disgusted by the cult's corruption. The priests have been entrenched for generations. Today, however, to advance in the orders a man must purchase preferment. It's hardly a secret that people often abandon their senile relatives or their unwanted little ones at the entrance to the crematorium, a cave-mouth hereabouts. You see," Phonicios finished, "once the priests fetch a victim underground, living or dead, the victim is never seen again. Once it was part of holy ritual that this be so. Today—well, many say the priests turn a coin from it, and prostitute their honor."

All he had learned on his tramp with Phonicios through the burial ground and the Sulphur Fields served to turn Brak's mood to one of gloom and silence for the rest of the journey. They soon reached the guarded postern gate in the city wall. With some relief Brak heard the heavy oaken gate slam behind them.

Night was falling now. The persistent mist turned lamps and lanterns to yellow blurs. Brak's footfalls rang hollow beside those of Phonicios. He could not get the stench of sulphur from his nostrils, nor the memory of freshly-closed graves from his mind.

At an intersection Phonicios halted before one of the stone idols in the image of Jaal the Leveller. The merchant bowed his head briefly, made a cabalistic sign in the air with his right

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hand, then gazed at Brak rather sheepishly.

Brak said, "Lord, there is no need to be embarrassed about asking your god to spare you further harm. In the light of what's happened—and what may happen still—I would say you were wise."

BY agreement, the two men decided to say nothing about the encounter with Huz and the black-smoke strangler at the palace. Still, Saria seemed to sense their mood during the evening meal. She took up a lute for a time, but put it aside soon when her father's stare remained vacant, lost in the shadows at the room's corner.

Brak finished a goblet of wine. He excused himself with a grumbled word, left the chamber. For some reason the hearth-fires failed to warm the house very much. He was anxious to roll up to sleep in the thick lambskin coverlet in his chamber.

Carefully Brak laid the new-shining broadsword beside the pallet. He stretched out. A night watchman cried distantly. Wind sighed around the house walls. Far away, a cedar log dropped and crackled in a hearth.

Brak found that slumber would not come. His mind played with plan after futile plan for relieving his benefactor of the burden of fear which had fallen over him as a result of the meeting with Huz al Hussayn. What to do, how to help—the final answers eluded him.

In their place Brak found himself seeing strange images. He lay in a limbo between wakefulness and sleep. The ebony whirls of the phantom strangler's face danced in his mind. Then he saw the leering one-eyed stone countenance of the Jaal image before which Phonicios had prayed for protection. Somehow, as in a fate-woven tapestry, the two faces belonged together. Somehow, both were part of a dark, incomprehensible fabric a-looming—

A white-blazing spear rowelled down and down to the center of his skull, *hurting*—

Doubling in the middle, Brak sat up. He blinked. Cold night wind touched his naked chest. In the corner, the oil lamp had bubbled out.

The spear was a dream. The pain was his mind's symbol for what had truly roused him. And even as the sound was repeated, Brak closed his hand over the carved broadsword hilt.

The scream of a female slave, mindless, gibbering with terror, rose up again.

Brak leaped to his feet, plunged forward. He was running so fast he struck the wall of the room. Moments later, he reeled down a short flight of

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steps to hangings which covered the doorway to the high outer porch. He battered at the silks. They swirled near his face, sinister fabric cobwebs. Just as he lunged through into the cooler air of the courtyard, he heard two other sounds—feet behind him, as people were roused in the household, and the scream repeated, knife-sharp.

Jerking his head upward, Brak saw the slave-girl at a window. From there she might have been watching the mist-hung moon. What had she seen that—?

A noise diverted him, down in the darkness of the wide yard below the long stairway up to the porch. Looking, Brak clenched his jaw. His belly grew lead-hard with sudden fear.

The iron-hasped courtyard gate lay like splintered matchwood. Framed against the dim glow of the street was a powerful-looking figure which moved slowly forward, hands doubled to fists, one ponderous foot lifting, then another, head turning, turning—

But it was not a man. Its skin was a cold glare of moonlight on stone.

Brak bit his lip. He saw the man-sized idol of Jaal the Leveller take a step, another.

It walked, with a grinding, a creaking. And it sought something, turning its head.

In the middle of its stone forehead, its great cyclopean eye was no longer gray stone but a bright, white-radiant thing, lidless, fully open.

Open and watching.

Watching and full of hate.

Full of hate and *alive.*

Chapter IV

DISBELIEF sagged Brak's jawbone in the awful instant when he realized that the idol in the yard below was no specter from stale dreams, but hard stone reality, somehow imbued with the power to move, to lift its ponderous feet as it was doing now, marching on a straight path toward the great house.

In the upper window from which the slave-girl had screamed, other heads appeared. Weird shadows bobbed inside the various wings of the house as lamps were hastily lighted. Male slaves, sleepy-eyed, stumbled onto the high porch behind Brak. One or two were armed with short clubs. Their talk was loud, confused, as they goggled at the stone thing marching across the yard below, its carved head swinging slowly from side to side as the white-fire cyclops eye in its forehead pulsed like some hideous gem.

Other slaves ran to the parapet of the roof. Against the misty moon, one girl was outlined stark and black, tearing at her gar-

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ments and wailing, "It is Jaal! Jaal moving! Come to bring destruction on this house! Woe to all of us who wear the livery of Phonicios. The god is angered with him, and will surely murder us—"

"Simple woman!" bellowed a voice just behind Brak. He whipped is head around. The freedman Calix thrust through the frightened slaves. The moon shone on Calix's sweating-cold cheeks, glinted on his curly red hair. But Calix had self-possession enough to bring along a short-sword. Now he waved it savagely toward the roof.

"Quiet that mewling female, you oafs up there! The rest of you be quiet as well!"

Immediately, from rooftop to porch, silence fell, except for the last, pitiful moanings of the girl who had been carried away from the parapet like one deranged. Calix crowded up close beside Brak. The two men leaned on the wide balustrade of the stone staircase. This stair led down the outer face of the house to the yard. There, the Jaal statue was advancing in a slow straight course toward the fountain which occupied the courtyard's center.

The fountain's circular wall was high as a man's belly, constructed of granite blocks mortared together. In the fountain's center a carved unicorn on a pedestal spurted a stream from its whorled horn. The water shone like black blood, highlighted by the glare from the statue's eye.

The slave-girl's hysterical cries died away. Only two sounds remained—the ripple of the splashing fountain, and the heavy crunch of the idol's immense feet.

It was six lumbering steps from the fountain.

Now five.

Now four—

"This must be a mummer's trick," Calix whispered. "Often they disguise themselves as the Leveller at the time of the showing of the Sacred Lamb Fleece."

Brak's long braid bobbed as he shook his head. "No. Look how the moon glows on its shoulders. As it shines on marble. That is not painted cloth. See how the gates lie smashed. Mummers could not do that."

"Then why should we wait? Let us attack the thing, destroy it."

THE steward started forward to the first step leading down to the yard. Brak caught his forearm, hauled him back. Calix whirled, eyes resentful. Before he could snarl a command to Brak, however, the big barbarian breathed low:

"False courage may only bring us all to grief, Calix. The thing

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is real enough. But it may have been sent to frighten, not to kill. Hold back until we see what happens."

The barbarian's grip was so strong on Calix's arm, his face so intense, shadow-stark, that the steward gave a quick, shamed nod of agreement. For it was plain to him, as it was plain to Brak, that if the thing attacked, ordinary weapons would stand little chance against it. Already this knowledge had created a cold tangle of dread in Brak's middle. His words to Calix had carried a confidence he did not feel.

THE Jaal-thing had nearly reached the fountain now. It showed no sign of turning aside to go around the obstruction. Breath whispered thinly in dozens of mouths. The crowd of household servants waited, faces round white blurs in the moonglare.

The living fire that shone in the idol's forehead struck the fountain water, causing more weird whitish ripples. From the corner of his eye Brak noticed that Phonicios had appeared on an upper balcony.

All at once, a berserk cry, half of courage, half of madness, split the still air:

"Why do we stand like goats in a pen? Strike the hell-spawn! Smash it before it kills us—"

"No, Amator! Stay clear of it!" Phonicios shouted from the balcony.

But already the fear-crazed slave, club in hand, was running from the corner of the house where he had been crouched. His tunic flapped as he leaped up to the fountain's rim. He ran around the rim to the other side, raised the club above the head of the stone Jaal. The statue paused, as if surprised.

Down came the slave's club, whipping through the dark air. And Jaal's head lifted, the cyclopean eye suddenly shot with red.

A mighty stone hand reached out, brushed aside the flying club. The idol's touch reduced the club to splinters.

The carved hand closed on the slave's arm.

The other stone hand shot forward to seize the slave's leg.

Brak tensed, bit his lower lip until the blood ran down his chin. Amator was lifted high over the idol's head, kicking, screaming in excruciating agony.

With one seemingly light pull, the stone idol ripped a living human being in half, neck to groin, and cast the shredded, blood-dripping halves into the pool.

And then, as Amator's remains dropped from sight, Jaal moved again. This time, as though some evil essence within the monster had sensed that the battle had been joined.

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TWO stone fists lifted, dropped down. The solid granite blocks of the fountain rim shattered like sand, crumbling apart. Water flooded out. It mingled with the blood of the torn-apart slave.

Jaal stepped forward, moving faster now. The thing shattered the unicorn fountain with a blow. Next the idol kicked at the rim of the fountain closest to the house. Again the great blocks fell apart.

Up came the idol's head, the eye searching, glaring, hunting its prey. Now it raised its huge stone arms toward the slaves crowded around Brak and Calix on the outer stair. It lumbered for them.

Brak's lips peeled back from his teeth. For an instant his face was inhuman, fanged like that of a wolf from the high steppes where he had been born. Swiftly he lifted his broadsword.

"No choice now. We must kill it if we can."

"Surround it!" Calix shouted, following Brak down the staircase at the run. "The rest of you men surround it, try to pull it down!"

Over the balustrade Brak saw Jaal's stone head looming. He twisted wildly, raised his broadsword to drive toward that flaming eye. The idol had reached the staircase which was still thronged with men rushing down to the courtyard. Brak's lungs hurt, so loud was his cry of warning. The cry was lost amid the crash and roar of rent stone.

Jaal's great gray fists struck the balustrade blindly, knocking huge holes in the masonry. The idol's feet kicked out. The foundations of the stair collapsed like dust. Brak felt himself falling amid a tangle of bodies.

Men shrieked. Calix cursed. Suddenly Brak struck the courtyard floor. He saw a whole section of the house wall shear away as the entire staircase collapsed. One of its huge blocks dropped toward hm, bringing dust and rubble with it.

Frantically Brak gathered his legs beneath him, jumped up just as the block hit with a noise of thunder.

More and more of the staircase sheared away. Three slaves were buried, flailing and shrieking. Brak wiped dust from his eyes.

Calix was vainly trying to pull a fourth pulped, half-dead wretch from under a fallen slab. Strange white light began to ripple and shimmer down the blade of Brak's broadsword. It took him a moment to comprehend the source of that light.

His brain cried a wordless primitive warning. Just as he spun, a weight like the weight of the whole earth struck his shoulder. Stone fingers closed—

There was a cold gray hand gripping his naked flesh. *A man-sized hand of living rock—*

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Jaal was behind him, grasping him by the left shoulder. Lightly at first. Then the stone hand began to close.

BRAK felt the muscles in his left shoulder begin to soften, fold together under the immense pressure of that awful grip.

Desperately he brought his broadsword from left to right. He slashed at the idol's eye. It seemed to fill the whole universe. It was a white, bottomless inferno, going down and down to a smoldering, smoky nowhere.

There was a blinding glare as Brak's sword-point hit the eye. Brak expected a violent contact, steel striking stone. Instead, it was like plunging the blade into some viscous fluid. A numbing shock shot through his whole body. But the grip of the stone hand seemed to lighten.

Brak pulled backwards, his shoulderblade nearly ripped apart. He was free a moment but the idol reached for him with its big blind hands again.

Two slaves, led by Calix, raced in from the left. The slaves were armed only with staffs. Jaal lashed out with the left fist, almost casually. The immense hand literally passed through the first slave's head, dissolving skull-bone and tissue into nothing. The headless body pitched over.

Calix hacked his short-sword against the out-thrust arm of the idol. The blade shivered, snapped.

Vaguely Brak realized that people were pouring into the courtyard from the streets, roused by the demonic attack. Shrieks, cries, oaths, made the night a pandemonium. Dust from the staircase gritted in his eyes, made it difficult to see—or was that his own weakness?

Brak hauled the broadsword back for one more drive at the whitish eye. The Jaal-idol was ripping the arms and legs off the second howling slave. Brak threw the whole strength of his gigantic body behind that thrust, only to yell aloud when the blade seemed to disappear within the whitish aura of fire surrounding Jaal's eye.

Shock-waves of pain blasted along his forearm, somehow transmitted from the eye through the blade to his body. Moment by moment the unbearable agony mounted while blue and scarlet eruptions flashed from the idol's eye. Somehow Brak had sunk his sword into thick, living fire—

His senses reeled as the pain burned him again, wave after wave. His mind no longer functioned. His body, automatically knowing somehow that many more of those jarring bursts would bring death, gave a spas-

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modic jerk. The spasm pulled Brak's sword-arm free.

He saw his steel bright and whole, down to the point. But violent reddish and cobalt flares burst from the whiteness at Jaal's forehead. Brak lurched backward a step. His naked backbone collided with granite. Amid the rubble left by the ruined staircase, Brak fell backwards over a fallen block.

AS he lay sprawled, Jaal began to advance. Brak's sword arm hung limp at his side. He knew he must stand, raise his arm, strike at the eye another time. Jaal moved his right foot. The foot struck the remains of one of the slaves. As Jaal's weight came down, only pulp remained of the man.

Numbness hammered at Brak's temples where he lay. Nausea beat upward from his belly. His shoulder throbbed, his sword-arm tingled. Images were distorted—the swollen moon; Jaal's white eye looming closer; the writhing figures of foam-lipped slaves who gibbered in terror and helplessness all around the stone-and-corpse-littered battleground.

Slack-jawed, Brak watched Jaal's mighty right hand form a fist again. The fist rose black and solid against the sky, came sweeping downward for his head.

The big barbarian rolled out of the idol's way. The fist split the block against which Brak had slumped.

Sprawled on his belly, Brak sobbed like a crazed madman as he lashed out with his sword, aiming for Jaal's stone leg.

The blade clattered like tin, making no dent. Blue sparks showered.

Before Brak could attack again, brighter reddish light blazed up. On his cheeks Brak felt searing heat. Suddenly he became conscious of the clamor of voices in the yard. Hair hanging in his eyes, he stumbled erect. Crowds thronged the street outside the gate. Men pushed forward in large groups.

One such group wore bronze trappings. And the light came from a lighted cloak which one of the armored watchmen had soaked in lamp-oil, fired and flung at Jaal.

The idol brushed it away. Another cloak, trailing orange tatters of flame, sailed through the air, draped across Jaal's arm. The idol reached over, closed its stone fingers around the burning cloth, held it until it burned out to a black ash.

Jaal's head was moving again, swinging slowly, left to right.

People in the crowd began to shove frantically backward, regretting the curiosity that had brought them from their houses. The idol swung around. It took

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a step, another. Through the film of sweat and blood streaking his face, Brak's eyes focused. Hazily, he understood. Not why, but what:

Somehow the idol-thing had sensed the great size of the crowd which had gathered. The idol began to walk faster, extending its huge hands before it, reaching, menacing. The crowd parted like a gnarled tree cleft by lightning. Scrabbling, moaning, the people rushed out of the way. And almost as though it were guided by some human sense of danger, the Jaal-thing lumbered across the gore-churned dirt of the yard, out through the open gates and down the street.

A ragged cheer started somewhere. "There are too many of us! The thing is afraid!"

As soon as the idol had passed, the crowd surged together again. The armored watchmen called loudly for order. Frenzied slaves began hunting for others of their number who might have been among the slain. Curious householders from neighboring streets muttered and shouted that an evil curse had fallen upon the city. Brak wiped his eyes, his reason returning.

Yonder he saw Phonicios descend from the staircase ruins, kneel with Calix beside a slave's corpse. Brak found himself buffeted by people rushing forward to inspect the damage. He tried to fight through to Calix. He wanted to tell the steward that they should pursue the Jaal-thing. The press of people was too thick.

Brak was not content to stand by in this moment of stunned confusion and let the apparition escape. With Calix or without him—Brak felt a primitive churning hatred of the infernal creation—the barbarian meant to destroy the monster if he could. If he could not, he might at least discover where it had come from.

Precious moments had been lost already. Brak scrambled over a block of stair masonry. He thrust at the people pressing forward from the gate. The cast of his features caused some of the curious to hurry to get out of his way.

Outside, in the street, he came upon three armored watchmen. One held a dark-lantern high. They were speculating in low tones about the advisability of pursuing the thing:

"—go yourself, if you've a mind. But swords are obviously useless against it. And I don't plan to risk my life chasing some sorcerer's—"

Brak whirled the man around by the shoulder. "Tell me where the thing has gone"

Another watchman sneered. "Down that crooked lane. But

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you're chasing ghosts, stranger. Ghosts or worse."

Brak ran, already fastening upon a suspicion that gave renewed swiftness to his stride. A ghost it might be. But a ghost summoned—or sent—by *someone.*

THE exertion of the battle against the idol took its toll as Brak rushed on, naked feet slapping slimed cobbles between high, dark houses overlooking the crooked lane. Those who had not thronged out to see the commotion had closed their shutters. As a result, the street into which the lane opened was deserted. Brak's great shadow flitted big and grotesque alone tiled walls. He wiped sweat from his face, peered far ahead.

There, where the lonely street intersected another from which a bright glow issued, Brak saw the shadow of something else flicker out of sight. Gray and massive on a wall, the shadow had been unmistakable.

Brak loped ahead, skidding, sliding, fingers hurting from gripping the broadsword so hard. He neared the intersection. At the corner was a house with a dim lantern over the door. Brak slipped into the gloom outside the lantern's glow, peered down the street.

Then he bit his lip again, this time in stunned disbelief.

Music reached his ears. The strains of a plucked lute, interspersed with the steady muffled beating of timbrels filled the street. Lanterns hung at each doorway. Brak's eyes flared briefly with understanding. The facades of the houses were gaudily decorated with murals of a crude character. The lanterns shed crimson light.

"Pleasure-houses," Brak breathed with surprise. "Noisy, and open as usual."

He went rigid, back against a wall. Down the street, before one of the unsavory houses whose front was slightly recessed, a patch of blackness stirred beneath a stone balcony supported by two thick wood beams. Whiteness flashed, glimmered.

Heart thudding, Brak ran to the street's opposite side. He began to slip along from doorway to doorway. Coarse male laughter mingled with the music and feminine giggles. Brak paid no attention. A shape took form as his eyes adjusted to watching the dark beneath the balcony.

Outside a partly-closed lattice, single eye dimly shining, the Jaal-thing stood rooted in a curiously human posture. Brak stalked closer—three houses away; then two; then one. He skulked unnoticed, directly across the street from the patch of dark where the Jaal-idol hid. Over the stone shoulders Brak

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had a blurred, fleeting impression of what the thing was watching. For a moment he wanted to laugh. This was worse lunacy than what had happened in the courtyard of Phonicios.

The stone demon, great carved legs and hands still streaked with the blood of its victims, was watching the girls inside the pleasure-house. It peered in upon them like some incredibly shy, witless child. From behind the lattice the timbrels thudded, the lute hummed a compulsive melody, and Brak saw the fleshy blur of a girl's body whirling in a dance while thick male voices shouted praise and vulgar endearments.

Brak's suspicions strengthened in a sudden burst of comprehension. He took a tighter grip on his sword. He swiped at his mouth. Carefully he studied the huge stone balcony beneath which the Jaal-thing stood immobilized, watching the women.

The two support beams which angled from the underside of the balcony to the wall below, just to either side of the lattice, were little higher than a man's head at their lowest point. And if they were as rotten as they looked, Brak's sword might cleave—

The Jaal-thing stirred. It leaned closer to the lattice. How long would its interest hold? Brak swallowed hard. He knew the idol might turn before he reached it. He knew this might be the last act of his life.

Pipes joined the lute and timbrel, skirling as the dance within the pleasure-house grew more frantic. Out of the doorway Brak lunged.

Half way across the street, sacrificing stealth for speed, he saw the stone thing raise its head. But its movements were slow. Brak kept moving.

The idol's head began to turn. Its white eye pulsed brighter as it sensed danger—

BRAK jumped, high and to one side. Both hands locked on his broadsword hilt. He hammered the cutting edge into the timber support with a force that made him cry out, so violent was the contact when he struck.

Jaal's cyclops eye seemed to blur, then brighten. Its head dipped as it looked downward at the barbarian who had sprawled on his back after his leap.

Now Brak scrambled up. Jaal took a lurching step. Brak heard a dry, faint cracking. He had no time to glance upward. The music within came to a sudden halt. A girl rushed to the lattice, let out a piercing scream.

Under the outstretched arms of Jaal, Brak scrambled like a four-legged animal. Once he was behind the idol he jumped up. Again he leaped.

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Both hands still on the hilt, he struck the other balcony support with all the power of his mighty arms. Though each blow had only hacked but part way into the ancient beams, weakening them that much was enough. As Brak went spilling backward into the street, wood creaked—creaked louder—and one of the support beams tore away from the lower wall.

The Jaal-idol somehow heard the grind of stone above. Its head lifted slightly. Then the wood gave way altogether.

The pleasure-house girls shrieked wildly as the great balcony came thundering down around them.

FROM where he lay in the middle of the street, Brak watched the statue disappear beneath the crushing weight of the stone blocks. Part of Jaal's shoulder broke away. Then the figure tumbled over on its side, covered with falling granite. White light from its eye flared furnace-bright a moment, just as suddenly dimmed.

Doors of other pleasure-houses crashed open. Scantily-clad girls and men in opulent garb spilled out, shouting alarms. Brak was on his feet now. The mighty sword in his hand discouraged interference. He started to run, back the way he had come. Abruptly, he jerked to a halt.

Broken from the stone body, the head of the Jaal-idol lay on its side, in clear view. Pearly radiance in the huge eye grew weaker by the moment. But even as Brak watched, something faint, small, whitishly cloud-like seemed to twist free of the stone eye, whirl briefly in the air like some ghostly essence.

Then the pearly patch went twisting and skimming up into the shadows near the rooftops, and vanished.

The eye within the carved head was like the stuff which surrounded it now—cold stone.

Behind him, Brak heard people shuffling forward. He spun, growling. One or two brandishes of his broadsword and the opulent patrons of the pleasure-houses gave up all thought of trying to halt this wild man with the lion-hide at his hips and the long braid hanging down his back. Brak plunged into an alleyway, raced through the dark toward the house of Phonicios.

But his victory was hollow. The knowledge sickened him.

For when Brak had seen the Jaal-thing rooted outside the pleasure-house, a bit of what Phonicios had told him had come to mind. He remembered Phonicios talking about how strong had been the woman-lust of the man known as The Thief-Taker.

Remember, Brak knew somehow that the disembodied spirit

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of The Thief-Taker had been the guiding force within the idol. Nothing else could explain the otherwise inexplicable behavior of the haunted statue.

Who had summoned back The Thief-Taker's evil spirit to wreak destruction on Phonicios? Running through the dark, panting, aching, Brak knew. The same worker of evil who had called up the phantom-thing that was Yem the Strangler.

In destroying the idol, Brak had hoped to destroy The Thief-Taker's controlling spirit as well; the spirit which, even after death, clung to its old ways, and drove a killer made of stone to watch dancing women.

But the bit of pearliness, the patch that spewed from the dying stone eye, had escaped from the prison of the statue's crumbling form. Escaped and gone back—*where?*

To its master.

The knowledge made Brak feel defeated. Far ahead down the twisting lane he heard commotion still rising from Phonicios's house. The victory won tonight over the idol was but a temporary one. Somewhere—in his imagination Brak saw it, was frightened—somewhere a pearly-white patch of mist was dancing over the beckoning palm of its keeper.

Now two things were clear.

Huz al Hussayn had command of the magic of the black realms.

And tonight would not end the game. The evil that had walked in a stone idol's body would surely return.

Chapter V

THROUGH the remainder of the long night the grim work which was the aftermath of the carnage at Phonicios's house went forward.

The families of the slaves who had perished in the attack of the idol bore their dead to the servant's wing. There, by taper-light, two hastily summoned members of the priestly burial cult prepared the corpses with scented balms and snowy white linen. Wailing and sobbing rose toward the paling stars, together with the creak of cart-wheels as the wrecked masonry and wood was cleared away.

Phonicios, great purple shadows of fatigue showing beneath his eyes, seemed to be everywhere. He supervised the repairs. He spoke with the families of his bondsmen who had died. He haggled with the oily-cheeked priests and made arrangements for the dead. Like the others, Phonicios seemed to want to get the dead burried swiftly and the rubble carted away, as if such rapid action might somehow wipe out the memory of what had happened.

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For several hours Brak had no opportunity to tell Phonicios what had taken place in the street of the pleasure-houses. He felt weary, haunted by vague fears as he watched Phonicios's litter being borne out the shattered gates in the false dawn.

Tapers flamed in procession. The families carrying the lights wore cowls of mourning black. The two porcine priests chanted and swung censers. Brak remained at a high window long after the funeral cortege had vanished, lost in gloomy thought.

Toward mid-morning the household returned to some semblance of order. Brak found Phonicios in the dining chamber.

The chief of the Merchant Guild looked more weary than ever. The big barbarian slumped onto a stool. Saria was clearing away an untouched platter of bread, wine and steamed hocks. She touched her father's shoulder.

"My lord, it is not well that you keep from eating. You have been awake all night."

"Has anyone slept or taken time to eat?" Phonicios snapped. "They've buried the dead. And all because of me. Take the food away. Perhaps the widows will want it. I haven't the belly for it."

Sad-eyed, the girl withdrew. Brak poured a goblet of wine from the single amphora remaining. He drained it, wiped his mouth, said: "Lord Phonicios, the blame does not rest on your shoulders. It belongs with that man we encountered at the palace, Huz. When you hear what happened last night as I went in pursuit of the Jaal-thing, you'll understand."

Rapidly Brak told his story. He concluded:

"Knowing only what you have told me yourself, lord, I surmised it was The Thief-Taker's spirit in side the stone, making it move. The spirit was put there, I'll wager, by your enemy."

Angrily Phonicios struck the table. "Then I must take action myself!"

Quickly he rose. He proceeded to the courtyard, Brak at his heels. They located Calix and Phonicios drew the steward aside.

"Calix, gather as many able-bodied men as you can find left in the household. Send them into the streets. Equip them with fat purses. Have them ask after Huz al Hussayn. But when they have word of him, they are to do nothing except return here. Once we know where he is, we'll rid ourselves of this curse which has fallen on us." Phonicios slapped Calix's shoulder. "You must be swift."

The red-haired steward grinned, a death's-head smile. "Rid ourselves of him, lord? How?"

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Said Phonicios softly, "We shall go, the two of us, and kill him."

Brak leaned forward. "There will be three who go, not two."

"So be it," Phonicios replied, gesturing Calix away. The steward raced into the house.

BUT Phonicios's plan proved fruitless before the moon had risen that same night.

He and Brak were alone in the dining chamber, picking at food, when Calix appeared. The steward tossed back the cowl of his cloak. From the cast of the man's features, Brak knew his news was unfavorable. Phonicios sensed it also. The older man watched impassively while Calix threw several bulging purses onto the ivory table.

"The last man has returned, lord, with most of his dinshas unspent. The story is the same everywhere. There is no word of Huz al Hussayn. Apparently he has gone into hiding. At any rate he has utterly vanished. Perhaps," Calix finished with a scowl, "he's gone down to the pits to commune with the demons who do his bidding."

Phonicios stalked angrily to the window, stared down at the moon-washed courtyard. The earth bore a scar-like pit where the demolished fountain had stood. After a moment, Phonicios turned.

"Then we must follow another course. We must protect not only the people in this household but the other members of the Guild. Bring me a parchment, and the quills. Stand by with a runner for the palace. We'll roust Mustaf ben Medi from his ostrich-feather bed and make him take action."

Moments later Calix returned carrying the materials. Phonicios moved to his writing lectern. With quick strokes he inscribed the parchment, writing an urgent plea to the vizier. The message described the calamity which had occurred the previous night, warned of the danger to the city if Huz al Hussayn should unleash The Thief-Taker's power, or the power of a whole army of spirits. In addition, Phonicios demanded military protection for himself—this to insure, he said in an aside to Brak, that his householders would be safe. He also argued strongly for placement of similar guards around the homes of high-ranking members of the Guild. Finally, he urged Mustaf to press an immediate and vigorous city-wide search for Huz.

The runner went racing out of the courtyard and was soon lost in darkness. Brak gloomed around the chamber, weary in his bones, yet unwilling to sleep and abandon Phonicios to a solitary vigil. Presently Calix re-

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joined them. He and Brak diced in desultory fashion.

Torch-light and haloos in the courtyard bought the three men to their feet. Within moments, the perspiring runner had ascended to the room, prostrated himself. The man rose, lifted empty hands.

"Where is the vizier's reply?" Phonicios asked.

"Lord," panted the slave, "he had no time to dictate a scroll."

"Bungler! You did not see him!" Phonicios leaped forward, hand lifted to strike.

"Mercy, lord" wailed the slave. "I was in his presence. I gave him the parchment, which he read. But he had no time to dictate a reply, because he spoke it instead. Do not beat me, I beg you."

SLOWLY Phonicios brought his hand down, opened his fist. An expression of shame slipped across his face. He touched the slave's arm.

"Forgive me, Dirax. The events of these past hours have left me in an ugly state. What did the vizier say?"

"The palace was in terrible confusion, lord. Chariots thick as flies in the barracks-yards. Men running hither and yon. Mustaf was overwrought and shouting the whole time. He bid me tell you that he can spare not one single man for protection, or to search for Huz. Couriers came from the frontier at sunset. Prince Rodar—" Here the slave licked his lips; fear shone gem-bright in his eyes. "—the army, lord, has been sent into retreat."

"What?" Calix shouted.

"Aye, master Calix. There was a great battle. Our Prince was defeated. Invasion by the Gords is only days or hours away."

Calix cursed low. "That's why the lamps shone late. The men we sent out earlier told me that nearly every window was alight. They assumed it was another one of Mustaf's feasts in progress."

Ashtir preserve us!" Phonicios muttered. "Destruction on destruction."

"Surely there is some way we can find this spellworker," Brak put in. "I'll go myself, to search his haunts, if you can tell me where to begin."

Wearily Phonicios reached over, snuffed the guttering lamp. Weird shadows gathered in the chamber corners. Slump-shouldered, the merchant shuffled toward the door.

"Tomorrow, perhaps. Not tonight. I'm tired of fear, of the darkness. We must all sleep. Perhaps by daylight we can decide what to do next. Today we have done enough. Calix, take the keys to the strongroom. Arm the men. Post them all around the house tonight."

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And with that, Phonicios shuffled tiredly into the corridor. Calix and Brak exchanged despondent looks. Then the former hurried out too, leaving Brak alone and pondering the futility of the situation.

Eventually weariness claimed Brak too. He retired to his pallet. He unbuckled his broadsword and fell into a dream-haunted sleep.

He awoke to a blaze of butter-colored sun spilling through the window. He had slept longer than he had expected. He wrapped the lion-hide tighter around his middle, picked up his broadsword and hurried to the dining chamber.

The room was deserted. With peculiarly anxious glances, a slave told him that Phonicios was to be found in the reception hall. Brak hurried away.

In the corridor outside the hall, Brak discovered Saria. The girl stood near the peacock-silk door hangings, bent forward in an anxious posture, listening. From behind the silks Brak heard loud voices raised in a harangue.

Before he could question the girl, she whispered, "It's a delegation of members of the Merchant Guild. They are not in a friendly mood. I wish I could go in there, but women are not allowed at their deliberations."

"From all the cursing, it sounds as though your father is in need of an ally." Brak clapped his hand on the broadsword-hilt and slipped inside.

PHONICIOS was facing a contingent of splendidly-dressed gentlemen. He flashed a brief, weary smile of gratitude when Brak appeared. The big barbarian took up a place opposite Phonicios's throne chair. Several of the Guild members, beringed and lavishly dressed, turned to stare at the intruder. At first there were looks of contempt. Brak returned these with an angrily, beetling scowl. The contemptuous looks were soon masked.

"These friends of mine," Phonicios said to Brak, "are Guild members. Their spokesman is Xanril the bangle-maker," He indicated a portly fellow in a persimmon-shaded robe. The color nearly matched the man's unhealthy complexion. A pearl glinted in Xanril's left ear; a pearl almost as tiny as the man's dark, mean eyes. Phonicios continued:

"My friends, Brak, have come in a body to demand that I resign forthwith as chief of the Merchant Guild."

Buoyed up by mutterings from his cohorts, Xanril stepped forward.

"We must act in our own best interests, Phonicios. We have our

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families—our professions—to think about. We have all heard what happened here last night." Quickly Xanril made the sign against evil-eye. "Clearly, if we continue our association, you will bring more ill luck down on us. You must try to understand our position."

"I understand," Phonicios barked, "that you're a pack of cowards!" His eyes grew shrewd. "Or is it more than that? Huz al Hussayn is a devious man. I could see his hand in this, if I didn't trust you gentlemen so thoroughly." Sarcasm dropped from his words like oil from an olive press. "I could see, for example, Huz wishing to frighten me out of the Guild, so that he might take over by frightening all of you in turn. Simpletons!" Phonicios stalked to where Xanril stood blinking. "Don't you remember the hysterical speech Huz gave when we dismissed him? He promised that one day all of us would serve him. That he would sit in the Guild's head chair! Why should he stop with revenge upon me? Already, like oxen, you're stampeded into such a state of fright that if I were out of the way, Huz could establish himself in my office with very little effort. He could bleed you of all sorts of special tributes! You dunderheads are too short-sighted to see the implications of my resignation—"

Phonicios squared his shoulders. "Consequently," he finished, "it's a resignation which I refuse to tender."

ANGRY voices broke out in reply. One merchant pushed Xanril aside, saying, "You must step down, Phonicios. We demand it!"

"You *demand* it? You—a pack of cowards—demand it? Hah!"

"The old wheeze about the pot accusing the sooty kettle has never been more appropriate than now, Phonicios!"

"Are you calling me a coward?"

"I am only pointing out," said the man, "that your message to Mustaf—asking for protection—is public knowledge. There were many in the palace last night who overheard your slave."

"Wait, you misinterpret it!" Phonicios began, flushing, stumbling over his words. The scarlet ripened on his cheeks. "My reason for the message was—"

"The reason," Xanril interrupted, "is painfully obvious."

"No!" Phonicios shouted. "I asked for protection for my household—even for all of you—but not for myself."

Hoots of laughter and catcalls greeted this statement. Brak's belly tightened with anger. Men were pushing and shoving to the forefront, eager to insult Phonicios now that he was momen-

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tarily rattled. Another man exclaimed:

"Would you put on such a show of fearlessness if you didn't have that wild-haired outlander—" An obese thumb was hooked at Brak. "—standing by to defend you?"

The lines in Brak's cheeks were stark, ugly. He shouldered forward to the man who had spoken. The others shrank back.

Brak's fingers touched the broadsword hilt. "Small men," he said slowly, "sometimes try to hide their own cowardice by attacking men like lord Phonicios, in whose shadows they're not fit to stand. If you wish to insult me, do it to my face, not via a brave lord who has backbone enough to tell you all to go packing. Though I may be an outlander, without perfume on my hair or delicate soft skin—" Brak's mouth cracked in a teasing, ghoulish smile. "—still I think I understand enough of your ways to answer your insults fittingly."

He let go of the sword-hilt. It clinked ominously back into the scabbard.

"Now," he said. "Who will throw the next taunt?"

"Calm yourself, stranger!" Xanril cried. "Naturally we did not intend to demean your friendship with Phonicios. We understand he befriended you when—"

"To the pit with such talk!" Brak roared. "Tell lord Phonicios the truth for a change! From the way you all tremble and wring your hands—" Unsure of his ground, Brak was desperately trying to reverse the unfavorable balance of events. "—I wonder whether someone threatened the lot of you, as lord Phonicios suggested. Ordered you to come whining here with your demands."

IN the back of the group, a merchant hastily studied the floor mosaics. Brak drew in a quick breath. The hit was scored! He seized Xanril's shoulder.

"Speak straight! Who sent you here to demand lord Phonicios's resignation? A man named Huz?"

Xanril threw up his hands. "The accusation is disgusting! We have not seen Huz—"

"Naturally we wouldn't listen to scum of that sort," another said.

Quickly all the others began chattering similar assertions of their innocence. But their eyes were deceitful, hastily averted whenever Brak looked at them directly. Soon the protests grew weaker. An uneasy silence fell.

Brak snorted. "Though your words are convincing, gentlemen, your faces fail the game." There was a metallic whisper, a flash, and Brak had the broadsword drawn. "Now take yourselves out of this house! It's all too plain that Huz has spoken to you.

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Well, you already have your answer from the master of this house. So begone!"

With a deliberately exaggerated flourish, Brak whirled the broadsword in an arc over his head. Xanril leaped out of the way, squealing with alarm. The merchants turned and bolted out.

The peacock-silk hangings settled back into place. Brak lowered his sword. He was almost tempted to laugh at the cattle-like fright of the delegation. But the grave expression on Phonicios's face stayed him.

The merchant asked, "Do you have some knowledge that Huz frightened them into coming?"

The big barbarian shook his head. "No, lord. I merely made a guess, based on what you said earlier. I wanted to unnerve them as they were trying to unnerve you. I only invented the accusation—" He paused. "But now I wonder how wrong we were."

Phonicios slumped in his throne-chair. "Not far wrong," he murmured. "Not far wrong at all. I saw their faces too." He sighed. "Alas, they were once my friends. Some of them are dullards, true. But I know them all. They would not turn on me as they did unless someone outside their group forced them to do it. Someone they feared. Someone such as Huz."

The middle-aged man was clearly disturbed and confused about what course to pursue next. Brak left him alone to meditate, wandering out into the streets for an hour. An atmosphere of uneasiness pervaded the crowds. People talked of nothing except the impending invasion by the Gords. And Offerings were heaped up at the feet of each stone Jaal-idol Brak passed.

Presently the sun vanished behind rain-fattened clouds. A sullen drizzle was falling by the time Brak returned to the house. Though it was only mid-afternoon, lamps and torches already burned bright.

BRAK sought out Phonicios again. He hoped to prompt the older man into a discussion of how they might run Huz to earth. Before he had even begun, however, he was interrupted by the arrival of Calix.

The rain-soaked steward had been to the armorer's, purchasing additional spears and swords for use in the event of an attack on the city. Phonicios listened to Calix's report, nodded, lifted a parchment.

"It was a poor day for you to send a love-note to my daughter, steward. I trust your rondezvous in the rain was pleasant."

"What, lord?"

"Really, Calix, things are confused enough as it is. You don't have to choose this time to go sneaking off to meet her, do you?

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I know there's a romance blossoming, and you know that I have no objection. I freed you, did I not? But a more opportune moment might be found for a rondezvous."

"I confess I'm confused about what you mean, lord," said Calix.

Phonicios sat bolt upright. "Where is Saria? Is she not with you?"

"As I reported, I have been to the armorer's the better part of two hour-glasses, lord."

Phonicios thrust the parchment forward. "Then who sent this note arranging a meeting with my daughter at the Spice Arcade? Your sign is affixed to the bottom. There. Plainly, the hieroglyph says Calix the Circassian."

White-faced, Calix studied the parchment.

"Lord, so it does. But I have not laid eyes on Saria since sun-up. Nor did I send this message. Have you seen your daughter this past hour?"

Terror came then, spilling into the dim chamber in a sudden materializing ebony cloud.

Phonicios shouted in alarm. Brak whipped out the broadsword again, cheeks cold, his belly too. From nothingness, the thick night-cloud had come spinning, shooting off little scarlet darts of light. While the three men watched, form emerged from the mist of formlessness—

An ugly face. Supple hands.

A dangling thread of smoke studded with ghostly knots—

IN the chamber it was suddenly the deep of night, stygian and cold. A nauseous smell of the pit swirled up. From the heart of the darkness through which Brak could barely see the far wall came a whispering croak. The voice seemed to gibber and growl by turns:

"I am Yem, mighty lord Phonicios. I am here and I am not here. I bring you word—"

Almost simultaneously, Brak and Calix lunged.

Phonicios's shout stopped them: *"Hold!* Listen to it!"

"Iron cannot harm the dead," sang the unearthly voice from the smoke-face trembling in the air. "But iron can harm the soft, warm living, lord Phonicios. The soft, warm living ones like your daughter, who is a prisoner, no longer in this house. I am bid to tell you this, lord. Your daughter Saria is alive. She is being held near a certain sarcophagus, the Sarcophagus of the Winged Sword, in the Sulphur Fields. I am bid to say she is well, unharmed. She will be so until the passing of one hour. When the sand runs out, send a single slave to the Sulphur Fields with an answer to a single question. Will you abdicate as ruler of the Guild? If the answer is yes, the

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girl will be returned from the Sulphur Fields, where you dare not go, or send soldiers, if you prize her life. If your answer is no—I am bid to tell you—*she dies—*"

THE last word went sobbing away to a low moan. The shadow-figure began to whirl once more.

Brak leaped forward, his frustration and fury uncontrollable. He hacked at the blackness. The dark form darted away, spiralled around a taboret. The smoke-face was falling apart—

Round and round an hourglass whipped the smoke. Suddenly there was a loud bump. The smoke faded.

A sepulchral laugh went wailing off into the distance. On the chamber floor sat the hour-glass, freshly up-ended. Purple sand spilled down into the empty bottom, running fast—

"We will go to the Sulphur Fields," Brak said. "Calix and I together."

"You will not!" cried Phonicios. "I will not brook your interference when my daughter's life hangs forfeit."

"We can bring her back!" Brak said. "Give us the chance, lord. There is time to—"

"Be silent!" Phonicios shrieked, beside himself with despair. "You are an outlander! This is my house and you will obey me! Now begone and let me think!"

Sullen, Brak spun around and stamped out.

Calix attempted to speak to him in the corridor. Brak shouldered by. He stalked outside.

The big barbarian debated only a moment. He could not let Saria become the victim of her father's hesitation. For Brak was certain that, regardless of Phonicios's decision, Saria would not be returned alive. Unless, that is, she were brought back by force.

Snatching a cloak from the slave quarters, Brak threw it over his shoulders. He hefted his broadsword and set out at a loping run through the rain, heading for the Sulphur Fields.

As he ran he mumbled an incoherent prayer, supplicating the dark, nameless gods from his wild northern homeland.

He begged them to help insure that his decision had not been the wrong one. He felt that he was doing right, that delaying or cowering would only guarantee loss of Saria's life.

And yet—*if he were wrong after all—*

He plunged ahead through the rain, faster.

Chapter VI

WHEN Brak reached the border of the Sulphur Fields, he discarded the cloak which had

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been protecting him from the rain. He tried to ignore the gloomy tickling of the mist on his face. The sky was blackening into an early dusk. The stench of the bubbling fire-puddles reeked in his nostrils as he crouched beside a monument on which a stone imp with amethyst eyes genuflected obscenely before invisible gods.

Ahead Brak saw nothing but a pattern of bizarre shapes, tormented black silhouettes against the dusky heavens. Then, looking sharp, he spied a sarcophagus taller than most, half visible a short distance away.

Brak rose, listening. There was no sound save the moan of the wind.

Because of the shifting light cast on the mist-slimed monuments by the fire-pools, vision was tricky. The scene before him seemed constantly shifting in patterns of tigerish blacks and yellow-oranges.

The tall sarcophagus he sought carried the figure of an immense crimp-backed demon with spreading granite wings. The demon held a stone sword tall as a man in its first. Beyond, there was a patch of light between tombstones. The light seemed to have a ruddier, deeper cast. Toward this Brak stole.

The sulphurous fumes from the underground crematoriums made his eyes smart and his belly churn. Several times he was choked, threatened with noisy coughing. He held back the spasms by biting his lip until it bled. Everywhere, the light shifted, mist blew, stone faces leered down.

With a trained stealth carried over from his days on the high steppes, he stalked closer to the sarcophagus atop which the half-human shape with wings held its awful stone sword extended. Now he was near the huge block which formed the base for the statue. He flattened his naked spine against the marble. Its touch was death-cold.

Carefully he inched his way to a corner. He risked peering out around it, down the plane of the base. Where the side ended, people waited beside a fire of smoking green wood.

The first person Brak saw was Saria. Her gentle face was pale, terror-washed beneath a shabby peasant woman's cowl. She was forced to stand, her silver sandals mud-scummed. From her posture Brak assumed that her wrists were lashed behind her back.

The person with her was Huz al Hussayn.

Brak's gaze grew savage as he watched the changing light from a nearby fire-pit streak the man's cheeks with a sickly orange glow. Huz's scraggly wisp of beard and the rag binding his hair at the

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nape were sodden with rain. His long, narrow gray eyes surveyed Saria unpleasantly.

"There, my pretty girl," Huz was saying. "There you see what will bring me success."

Numbly, near to fainting, Saria shook her head. "Madman," he whispered. "It's only a jar. A cheap wine jar."

SUCKING in his breath, Brak edged around the corner of the sarcophagus. Shadow thickened around the base for half the distance to the far corner. Through this blackness Brak went creeping, until he was just outside the shifting rim of light. He went rigid as one of the grotesque figures on the tombs all around him. He was barely conscious of something massive overhead—the statue's ponderous sword, thrust far out into space.

"Cheap, eh?" Huz chortled. Brak could now see the wine vessel. It reached nearly to Huz's shoulder. Its round basswood lid was tightly fastened in place by half a dozen blue wax seals. The bony man sidled over, stroked the jar's curved side.

"The value of such a jar depends upon its contents, my girl. And this one has valuable contents indeed. Would you believe there's a soul prisoned in it?"

When Saria gaped, disbelieving, Huz lifted one shoulder in a shrug.

"That is, if you can call the evil *something* within a man—the something which lives after he dies—a soul. Within this jar, my girl, floats a little cloud no bigger than my fist. Ah, but the power it has! It belonged to a man known as The Thief-Taker. From the way your eyes grow large, I see you recognize the name. Yes, it's the same man. The rascal who, half the time, could not divert his attention from corrupting anything female. The other half? Well, if any creature was evil, wholly evil—and I flatter myself that I'm a good judge—certainly The Thief-Taker was the one."

With this little lecture Huz seemed to be amusing himself, presumably until the arrival of the slave who would carry Phonicios's answer. A fat bubble on the fire-pool surface erupted with a shower of sizzling sparks. The burst of radiance gave Brak a momentary glimpse of another, fully cowled figure hovering further back in the shadows. Brak blinked. Once more he saw only foggy darkness.

Had there been someone there? Or were imagination, fear, the atmosphere of this damnable graveyard playing tricks?

"—when I choose to release that whitish knot of ghost-stuff in the jar, my girl," Huz was saying, "I shall rise to great eminence in the city-state which

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Prince Rodar is now in the process of losing to the Gords. I'll act before that happens, to be sure."

Huz paused, savoring Saria's fear-crazed expression.

"Shall I tell you how? Quite simple, my girl. I have learned how to direct that little cloud, that knot of hell-stuff, into any solid object of my choosing. When I do, the cloud brings the object to life. I can send such an object on any mission I choose."

Subtly, suddenly, the moment froze.

AT first there was no sound. Only a strange illusion, for Brak, of time stopping while a tiny spiderweb crack appeared in the clay surface of the jar.

The crack divided.

Divided again.

Only a heartbeat's time actually passed. But Brak seemed to watch the whole faintly obscene multiplying of the cracks as if it took an eternity. Abruptly, there was a loud report. The great jar literally blew to pieces.

Shards flew. One sizeable one whizzed toward Brak. Without thinking, he ducked.

The shard struck the sarcophagus base. Huz spotted Brak's movement in the dark. He whipped an enamelled dagger from his girdle. Cursing his clumsy, automatic reaction, half-bent and having stumbled forward into the light, Brak was conscious of a streak of white spitting from the jar into the darkness above his head—

"Three heads of hell!" cried Huz. "A watcher—"

Above Brak the barbarian, blackness *moved.*

Some forgotten instinct made him jerk his head back. He opened his mouth for a shout that never came.

Over him, the head of the winged creature on the sarcophagus was turning, creaking, bending down.

With sudden speed, the living statue moved its now-living fist. The ton weight of the stone sword came arching down for Brak's skull.

Only the posture into which Brak was doubled saved him. The stone sword descended faster, racing in toward him. Brak let his legs go limp. He struck the soggy mud, felt an immense rush of air near his shoulder. With a crash and crumbling, the stone sword hit the sarcophagus, shattered into fragments.

Two of these struck Brak as he struggled to rise. Dimly he glimpsed Saria's terrified face. Huz seemed equally astounded. Brak had no time to wonder at the strangeness of the man's reaction. Even as he wrenched himself up from the earth, struggling to free his broadsword where it was impaled in the slime, ebony mist whirled close.

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There was high, echoing laughter. Hands of night-stuff coalesced. Brak stumbled back. Between the hands hung smoke-rope, knot-studded.

Brak's shin struck a low headstone. He pitched over into the light, a sword's length from the edge of the bubbling fire-pit.

The smoky head and torso of Yem the Strangler, eyes bright as the torture-fires of another world, dipped and flew close.

The smoke-rope closed around Brak's neck.

The phantom knots dug in.

Brak writhed, strangling.

Wildly he hacked the air with his broadsword. Bending his legs beneath him until he thought his spine would crack, he managed to hurl himself erect. The smoke-face hovered near. The knots tightened. Vermilion stars danced within Brak's skull.

THROUGH mounting pain Brak glimpsed the face of Huz, slack as melted wax. Huz unable to control his own demons? Madness!

But worse madness was the sudden clouding of Brak's vision, the certainty that death was near. The rope his broadsword could not cut took its toll in his throat.

The big barbarian seemed to lurch like a drunken man, fighting off a cloud. Through his wild contortions, wrenchings, divings, he grew dimly conscious that the more he pulled in one direction, the harder became the tugging on his windpipe.

The face of Yem the Strangler was incredibly close now. When Brak pulled one certain way, why did it contort?

As he saw a halation of light beyond the smoke, he understood. The thing was afraid of the fire-pit—

Brak went limp, as if falling. There was a faint, echoing titter from nowhere. Then Brak tightened his legs, hurled his whole body forward.

At the last instant he braced his feet in the mud to keep from pitching into the bubbling hole. The phantom knots tightened, unbearable, agonizing—

He had gambled, lost—

A trailing wisp of the smoke-stuff ignited with a bluish burst.

Frantically Brak hurled himself backward. The smoke-rope whipped away from his neck, lacerating it. Brak collided with the base of the great sarcophagus as another creeper of fire caught the smoke-stuff that was Yem, burned upward, igniting in burst after bluish burst.

The tongue of fire seemed to leap and swallow up Yem's cloud-self, drag it down toward the pool's surface. All at once, nothing remained but a faint black rind on the surface of one tiny

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part of the pool. A putrescent stench hung in the air. Far away beyond space, beyond time, a tormented soul was shrieking in utter desolation—

Yem was dead at last.

Brak's chest ached. His mind reeled with horror. Huz was half-crouched, goggle-eyed. The figure just behind suddenly emerged from the shadows, cloak swirling back.

"This man I have seen before. We might have expected him. Rather, *you* might have, clod. I did."

"Then it was you—shattered the jar?" Huz mumbled.

"Yes," said Ilona, witch of the Gords.

HER yellow hair blew like the drapes of the dead in the sodden wind. Her luminous eyes burned hate at Brak:

"I sensed him watching. I let out The Thief-Taker, and summoned Yem as well. Now, Huz, you puling idiot, stand away and let me engage him now that he's killed Yem forever. You've neither the skill for it nor the desire I have to finish the barbarian. I have a memory of this big savage, you see. A hateful memory."

Suddenly Ilona's right hand rose. Her fingers were supple, motioning—

"Travel, ghost!"

Behind him, Brak heard a roar, as of stone disturbed. He understood at last the source of Huz's power. He thought he understood even more—an awful secret perhaps even Huz did not comprehend. For Huz was giggling, spit-lipped with delight as Ilona shrieked again:

"Travel, ghost!" Right, left, right, left, in the sacred circles—*travel!"*

Out of the dark behind Brak flew a four-winged gargoyle, stone, alive, sailing at his head—

The barbarian slashed out with his broadsword. The edge clove the stone breastbone of the flying gargoyle. Rocks rained down, drawing blood from Brak's shoulder. Another fragment grazed his head, dizzying him.

His arm still shuddered from the sword-blow. But he felt a sudden, savage confidence rising, a war-lust. He could shatter as many stone things as might fly down from their perches to—

"Travel, ghost!"

A great weight hit Brak in the chest. He lurched aside, twisting to bring up his sword.

The graveyard figure, a carved imp with ten claws on each fist and a horn rising from its snout, spun round and round him in the air. Both hands on the sword hilt, Brak hammered home a blow. The statue split, crumbled. A whitish essence darted up, out of reach.

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Ilona cried her incantations. Immediately, from Brak's right, a great carved bullock lumbered at him.

Desperately Brak jumped to the top of a boulder. He aimed a blow at the thundering stone bullock as it passed, clove it. Out of the bullock's skull oozed a writhing whitish cloud. It vanished in the dark.

Brak had only a moment's rest. Panting, he saw another nightmare flying on the foggy wind. A great stone chariot with a many-eyed granite crone for its driver rode the air without support, thundered down the night.

Silhouetted against the sky in a posture of agony, Brak again raised his broadsword, brought it around as he howled like a maddened thing.

The wheel of the flying stone chariot collided with his blade. The contact drove pain into his shoulder-sockets, hurled him out into space. He landed with a jarring thud, struggled to rise.

"Travel, ghost!" Ilona shrieked.

THE Thief-Taker's spirit jumped from the stone chariot. It fell to the ground instantly, broke apart. A moment later, a stone crawfish-thing with clicking claws came scooting out from among the headstones.

Blood-streaked, dizzy, Brak lumbered to his feet again. But there was no confidence in him now, only desperation. Ilona could drive The Thief-Taker's essence from statue to graveyard statue, time without end.

Berserk with frustration, Brak screamed curses and smashed his blade against the crawfish-thing's right claw.

The broadsword snapped.

The other stone claw buffeted Brak in the belly. He felt his legs weaken. He dropped to all fours, shaking his head, mumbling, "No, stand up, stand! Do not let her—"

The grave-idol's claw hit sharply against the side of Brak's head. With a moan, he flopped over on his back, gore-streaked fighting arm limp.

Distantly, Ilona called incantations. At once the crawfish-thing turned back to lifeless stone. Its stalked eyes stared frozenly at Brak's body.

Into the periphery of Brak's misted vision swam Ilona's face. Her features contorted with the hate that had dwelled within her since Brak's slaying of the Gord admiral. Her face blurred like a vision in a flawed mirror as she bent down, but Brak knew it was only the effect of his dazed senses.

"I could have sent ten more idols against you, barbarian. And ten times ten more after that. I wish the battle had lasted longer, so that you might have had

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your reason, your brains cracked by the futility of trying to fight me."

"Witch-woman," Brak mumbled. making it a filthy name. "Sorceress. Black she-dog. You —"

Daintily Ilona lifted one sandal. She placed it on Brak's face, shoved his head down in the slime.

"Be quiet. Lie there like the beaten cow you are."

Somewhere, Saria was sobbing. Huz scuttled forward, clutched Ilona's arm. The sorceress spun, threw off his touch like something unwholesome. Huz blinked.

"Lady, the hour's nearly expired. I hear a man hallooing in the fog. Sent by Phonicios, I'll wager. If you will stay with this brute, I shall go to meet—what's wrong?"

Ilona shrugged. "The ox won't move, merchant," she said, with obvious cold pride. "I'll come with you to learn the answer. After all, it's this decision by Phonicios that brought us to this wretched place tonight."

"Don't be angry," Huz whined. "You agreed to help with my plan for revenge."

"So I did," Ilona said, nodding briskly. "But the barbarian's blood is practically cold already. The sport is losing its savor. Let's get it finished."

So saying, she marched past Huz al Hussayn imperiously, disappeard around a pile of rock broken from the Sarcophagus of the Winged Sword.

GROANING, Brak managed to roll onto his belly, raise himself on all fours again. He heard the hallooing voice once more. Presently Huz spoke, somewhere out in the darkness:

"He's alone, as I bade. I recognize the livery, too. A household slave."

There was more muffled conversation. Brak wanted to stand up. His wounded, stricken body would not obey him. Saria's muffled crying beat in his ears, receded, replaced by the tones of a man's voice:

"—is the message my master Lord Phonicios bade me convey to whoever I might meet here in the Sulphur Fields. Phonicios has already sent parchments to the members of the Merchant Guild, notifying them of his resignation. The parchments should be in their hands this moment. No longer will he serve as their chief. He begs that his daughter Saria be returned, as was promised if he kept his part of the bargain. He wished me to say further—"

"Enough!" Ilona interrupted. "Begone, or you'll see the pit yawn under your feet!"

Brak heard sandals slopping rapidly away in the mud. A firebubble popped in the nearby pit.

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Shadows flickered across his vision as he peered at the ghastly jumble of smashed statuary.

Saria was lying on the ground. Huz al Hussayn and Ilona emerged from the mist. Huz licked his lips, rushing forward.

"I'll chop the girl's bonds. Then we can be away from here." Huz drew his dagger once more. As he leaned over to free Saria, Ilona said:

"No, Huz."

"What's that?;

"Do you want nothing more than the trumpery triumph of Phonicios resigning?" Ilona asked.

"I don't understand."

"Isn't Phonicios your enemy?"

"Of course."

"And has he not already committed himself to abdicate his position?"

"Yes, he has."

A sly little smile stole across Ilona's berry-colored lips. She gestured at Brak. "The yellow-haired outlander has served Phonicios. So why not complete your revenge upon the man who threw you out of your rightful place. Let the girl stay here, and the outlander as well. Let both of them remain among the dead—dead themselves."

On hands and knees, trying to gather strength to fight a last time, Brak marvelled at the change in the behavior of Huz al Hussayn. Upon first encounter he had seemed a strong, commanding figure. But now he acted fearful of the Gord witch. His voice dropped, took on a wheedling note:

"Ilona, when I sent my demands to Phonicios, I made a bargain saying—"

"You also struck a bargain with *me!* Which is more important?"

Huz's eyes narrowed. "You would have me use the knife?"

Ilona laughed again. "No. There's another way. You yourself told me."

She bent, whispered, then drew back. She watched Brak with cold amusement.

HUZ'S expression wavered, uncertain. Then it grew crafty. Then wavered again: "But—"

"If Phonicios has already handed in his decision, won't the Guild accept it as irrevocable? Won't they refuse to let him reconsider, whatever happens?"

"Probably," Huz agreed, "granted their current temper. Phonicios is in great disfavor."

"Then do what I suggested with the girl. And with the barbarian too."

Huz al Hussayn plucked at his scraggly beard.

And smiled.

And said, "*Yes.*"

During that one moment, when Ilona and Huz were grinning at each other in ghoulish congratu-

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lations, Brak waited. Then he waited no longer. Like some primeval beast he rose from hands and knees, racing at them, fingers formed into claws.

One claw-hand dipped down, seized a stone. He drew his hand back to hurl the stone at Ilona's head. But her fingers were already white-supple in the firelit mist, weaving a pattern—

Out of the darkness sailed a stone spear. It struck, opened up a bloody trench in Brak's temple. The rock dropped from his hand. He went down, stunned.

The stone spear clattered away. A whitish cloud danced out of it, whirled overhead. Half-conscious, Brak felt himself dragged a long distance. He lay in the dark. The sulphurous smell was particularly strong.

Presently he heard Huz panting. His dazed mind told him that Saria had been brought and dumped like a meal-sack beside him.

Ilona's laughter floated out of the murk. "They will not die easily. Not if what you told me is true, merchant. Come, let's hurry away from here. I want the outlander to have ample time to remember that the witch of the Gords does not suffer her people to be killed."

Footsteps slithered away in the slime. Silence fell.

The hideous sulphur reek swirled up. Brak dozed.

DISTANTLY, gongs rang. He heard muted chanting.

Colors pulsed against his closed eyelids. Mumbling, incoherent, he opened his eyes. Torches shone. The chanting increased.

There was a sickly smell of unguents. Slippery hands gripped his body. A dark arch seemed to float above him.

Then he understood. The arch was the entrance to a cave.

The arch had not come down. He had been raised up, by the priests who tended the underground crematorium.

Twisting his head, he saw Saria, prone and unconscious. She was likewise being carried on two dozen uplifted palms.

The chanting beat high. Brak was too weak to struggle.

The strong male voices of the priests, chanting in unison, thundered against the roof of the sloping corridor hewn from solid rock.

Torchlight flamed and spurted.

A gong rang, a brassy herald of death. Another gong.

Brak's mind slipped into darkness.

The procession of priests wound down and down the tunnel, carrying the gore-streaked figure of Brak the barbarian to the welcome that waited where the inexorable crematory fires burned in the bowels of the world.

(*To be concluded next month*)

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The trouble with pesticides is, you never know where they'll lead, as Rachel Carson pointed out in her book. Poor Gliddon, however, would have settled for a "silent spring" instead of . . .

The Scent of Love

By LARRY EISENBERG

IT'S quite similar to what was done on Earth in the early days," said Gliddon. He stared at me intently, attempting to fix me, I thought, with the depth of his emotion, rather than the cogency of his arguments.

"I don't see that its similar at all," I said. "The pesticides were merely used without planning or control."

"But don't you see," said Gliddon. "It was really a matter of Ecology. You cannot fight insects by attempting to destroy them. If you do, they fight back by mutating, by developing species which are resistant to your chemicals."

He leaned back against the Banya tree, his forehead furrowed in a harsh frown.

"You have to outwit them by *natural* means," he said.

I was peeved with the obtuseness of Gliddon's reasoning and I suppose it showed. I have little patience with the ivory tower scientist who is not oriented toward the practicalities of a real, down to earth, problem. As Commissioner in charge of Insect Control, it was my task to eradicate, or at least control, the proliferous Giant Predator, a large roachlike insect with powerful mandibles that tore away the bark of the Banya tree. Since the economy of our Sector was completely dependent on the fruit of this tree, it was imperative that the Giant Predator be brought to heel.

One of the complications in treating with this insect was its utter fearlessness, evidenced by its readiness to attack humans or aborigines. The aborigines of our Sector would not work in the presence of the Giant Predator. From time immemorial, the aborigines had protected their Banya trees by surrounding them with pits of lime. But the Giant

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Predator had met this weapon with uncanny tactics. When encountering lime pits, the Predator would back off and return with leaves or bits of twig and drop this débris on to the pit until a layer of carpeting made safe passage possible.

We, for our part, had attempted a more modern approach. We had sprayed the trees with our most powerful insecticides, insecticides which were not toxic to man, since the Banya was a porous barked tree which inevitably showed traces of the spray in its fruit. But all of the sprays had proved to be relatively ineffective. It was in desperation that I had come to Gliddon.

ELLSWORTH GLIDDON was an introvert who had never mingled with any of the other Colonizers from Earth. He had "married" an aborigine, a not quite human creature, which in and of itself marked him as a man who held his own worth cheaply. He operated a small biochemical laboratory in a grove of Banya trees, an enterprise which brought in a sufficient income for his limited needs. And his aborigine wife was adept at turning the fruit of the Banyas to every culinary need.

We made use of Gliddon's services inasmuch as the prevalence of blood ailments in the Sector and the constant need for blood counts precluded the shipping of blood samples to the Sector Capitol. But Gliddon was a fanatic on the problem of Ecology. He was constantly battling our program, pointing out supposed terrible consequences of the natural imbalances we were allegedly producing. But none of his dire prophecies had ever come to pass. There were a few malcontents among the Colonizers and many among the aborigines but none of them amounted to a hill of beans in the decision making Council.

Swallowing my pride, I addressed myself directly to the situation.

"I am authorized," I said, "to pay you ten thousand Sector Credits, if you can produce a working solution to our problem. Within limits, I will give you a free hand, but I want constant consultation and I warn you, I will not hesitate to call off the project if I become convinced that you are going off the deep end."

Gliddon nodded at me, wearily.

"I suppose you're doing this out of desperation," he said. "And yet what I propose to do is hardly new. As far back as the middle of the twentieth century, it was discovered that a particular type of dimethyl propionate carried by the female of the American Cockroach, elicits an electrical response in the an-

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tennae of males. Experiments carried out at that time showed that by concentrating the attractant in a suitable location, thousands of males could be lured to that spot."

"What's this story got to do with the Giant Predator?" I said testily.

"Only this," said Gliddon. "I think I've isolated a similar olfactory stimulating element in the female Giant Predator."

IT was at least two months later before any substantial progress had been made in setting up laboratory facilities large enough to produce decent amounts of Olfactory G, the element isolated by Gliddon. The refractoriness of the aborigines, their preoccupation with festivals and easy living, was extremely frustrating to my efforts to hasten things along. Most of them lived off Banya fruit which they plucked (illegally from Sector trees) without any payment.

Gliddon had become more withdrawn than ever, immersing himself in the tortuous separating process necessary for the distillation of Olfactory G. I had initially suggested to him the possibility of artificially synthesizing this element. But the time and enormously sophisticated facilities necessary for the task, made my suggestion impractical, I knew.

Gliddon had, I must admit, attacked the problem in an eminently practical way. He had trapped thousands of Giant Predators, sorted out the females, and then begun the tedious process of extracting minute quantities of Olfactory G. from each one. Handling these creatures was a terribly difficult matter and the flesh of his fingers was badly mutilated by the tearing mandibles.

I set up temporary headquarters at nearby Sector House and I stopped by daily, met by the silent pink skinned wife of Gliddon, the aborigine female whom I could not bear to call *Mrs.* Gliddon. I would greet her with courtesy but no more. And she, in the traditional way of the aborigines, would serve me with the fermented Banya fruit drink (which we Colonizers had jocularly termed Banya tea) and the delicious hot bread made from a dried Banya fruit flour.

I would tentatively look in on Gliddon's laboratory, usually saying nothing. But if he was not deep into his work, I would get him to tell me of his progress and how much more he had to go.

One afternoon, when I was despairing of ever seeing the successful end of this project, Gliddon came out of his laboratory, his eyes red rimmed, a blackened stubble of beard edging round his lips and over his chin.

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"I think I've got enough for a starter," he said to me.

I leaped to my feet.

"Can we initiate full control?" I cried.

"Good Lord, no," he said testily. "I have enough Olfactory G to spray about fifty trees. That should be sufficient to conduct a prelimiary test."

My jaw dropped.

"*Spray* trees?" I said. "But you must be out of your head! You'll have hordes of male Giant Predators devouring our trees. What sort of cruel hoax is this?"

Gliddon smiled at me without displaying his ill cared for teeth. It was a rebuke, I knew, and I flushed to the roots, aware that somehow I was making a fool of myself.

"We'll run lime trenches around the Banyas," he said.

"But we've tried that," I said warily. "The damned Predators build their leaf bridges and pass over unharmed."

"That's true under normal circumstances," said Gliddon. "But under the exciting influence of Olfactory G, they'll discard their usual precautions. I know," he said, leering at me. "They've done it in my laboratory. Sex is a powerful drive in the Predator."

"I'll believe it when I see it," I muttered. But I arranged for the trial spraying of Gliddon's own trees. Surely, I thought, he would not risk the destruction of his personal crop. I brought in ten aborigine males who spent the better part of a week circling each of the trees with a lime pit.

"One last thing," I said to Gliddon when all preparations had been completed. "Is Olfactory G poisonous in any way? You know how the Banya soaks up any spray."

"Its completely non-toxic," said Gliddon. "I'd stake my life on it. It's quite similar in molecular structure to food additives that have been used for years without incident."

THE next day, the ten young aborigine males set about spraying the fifty trees. Each of them was wrapped in a plastic covering for it was essential that none of the spray touch their bodies. The process went off without incident and we settled back on our vantage point atop the roof of Gliddon's house, sufficiently far away for safety yet close enough to see with a good telescope.

It was an uncanny sight. As I watched, taking turns with Gliddon, (for telescopes were still hard to come by in our Sector), a great seething mass of Giant Predators seemed to erupt from the ground and progress in a torrential swell toward the sprayed Banyas. They were caught up abruptly when they hit the lime

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pits, seared into charred bits of insect flesh, but the ranks behind them pressed on without heed until the pits were choked with the dying bodies of the males.

I found myself breathing hard, the sweat running down my body in streams.

"Its an incredible thing to see," I said to Gliddon.

He nodded triumphantly.

"Its the *natural* way," he said, trying to suppress the gloating quality that had come into his voice. "You see I was right after all."

Tears of exhaustion filled my eyes as I turned to grip his hand.

"You were," I said, unashamed of my tears. "You were right and I was wrong."

AT Gliddon's direction we set up a swift, chemical mass production line for isolating large quantities of Olfactory G and within six weeks time, we had sprayed almost fifty thousand trees, successfully. The spurt in Banya fruit output was enormous. Freed of the ravages of the Predator, our exports to other Sectors boomed to millions and millions of credits. Intimations began to come through that I was due for a much more substantial post in another Sector, at a high administrative level.

And then one day, the letter of appointment came through. I was elated as I read and reread the almost laconic notification. I dressed hastily, not taking my usual pains, and raced through the streets to Gliddon's house. It was, I had to admit to myself, basically all his doing. I found his wife on her hands and knees, digging a huge encircling lime pit about the house. I stared at her in fascination. The vagaries of the aborigine mind have always been just beyond my comprehension.

I saluted her cordially and asked if Gliddon was at home. She came erect and stared at me, nodding silently and beckoning me into the house. I took a seat reluctantly, aware that I must go through the inevitable ritual of aborigine hospitality. She went off and returned with a large cup of Banya tea and a delicious fresh baked portion of the Banya bread. It took all of my self control to sip the tea slowly and eat the bread in a staid manner but at length I managed to finish, aided by the fact that I had surreptitiously stowed half of the bread in my pocket.

"May I talk to your husband, now?" I said.

She beckoned me after her and I followed through the labyrinthine halls until I found myself before the half opened door of a large bedroom. Within, on the bed, was a figure almost wholly swathed in bandages. I

(*Continued on page 127*)

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THE FAILURE

By DAVID R. BUNCH

He came to the Place where the curves of all creation coned in, on the final field of Calculable Knowledge.

HE came to me in June's opiate weather and stood lean and assured before me, bold-plain in the fields of sunlight. He had a pointed nose, ears flung back like wings, and he had big fins strapped to wedge-shaped heels. When he spoke, his words were mumble-drone, and his eyes looked through and far past me. "The trip . . . to make. Far journey . . . Appointment in Time . . . friends waiting . . . assignment in Space. High on the last curve . . ." Then he looked at me, cold-eyes, and I murmured, "Yes, yes, of course," though of course I did not know. I regarded him and I could see he was more than strange. A wind whipped through his shiny new-forged hair and galed it back in threads of wire that hummed, while I felt no breeze through mine. Things that had never touched on me seemed to glint from his angles and shallow curves, and his flesh that looked metal-hard had the sheen of brilliant steel, or perhaps tin that was polished. His muscles, though live and rippling, seemed made of lead clots.

"Where do you wish to go? What are you out for?"

"Oh ho," he answered me, "I'm out to get what all men should be most wanting. I long for Final Knowing, small sound the wide arcs of Creation must make where they slip and chafe at the far stem-end of the world. Or maybe it's merely a light, some flash like a billion stars exploding in one eye's thought of final clarity. Or if it is soundless movement, that also I must see—some small small midge-to-find, racing on silent feet, swiftly! faster than light! wee minikin, Time! accepting offers of bright new shoes always across a place. Ah, if it is that—and if I can find that place!" In his excite-

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ment he danced on his wedgy feet; he laughed strangely four notes of the octave and spoke again. "If I can find . . . and look. Through the Eye of final Calculable Knowledge! If I can hear . . . a final answer . . . Out There. I'll know . . . I'll control . . . I'll have Finality!"

"Yes? Oh, do you really think that is possible?"

"But I'll have to be fast," he went on, ignoring my questioning, "keener than light, far swifter than thought. And somewhere far above this green spot of sick earth and pale sunlight, at a place prereckoned, there will come floating an island. Colored like moonlight, but burning with brightness more than all the suns! It will be the King's ship sent for us, his atom subjects. Then we shall be taken on this brightest of all space galleons to the Court. Not as prisoners—oh no! I shall sail as a Captain, answerable but to the God-King of all-knowing."

HE dropped his head then, and gales washed smoothly past a steel face; there was a taut sound —power and wind contending in metal hair. When he raised his head I saw that his glinty-hard eyes were red-marble stars where visions crawled and clung. And his chest heaved in some giant anticipation as he imagined himself honored before the throne where a God-King sat—in the courts of Calculable Knowledge. "Where do you think He is? What do you think He is?"

I could sense how my questions shook him, and softer hands than his, or mine, seemed to rush from the air to clutch him hard for a moment. Just for an instant it seemed he shrank, and I thought I heard his metal shell rasp and crinkle; surely the apparent face of strength winced slightly. But he mastered his doubts, feigned nonchalance and replied, "To such questions you ask there have always been many kinds of guessed-at answers. Now which ones would you care most to listen to?"

"I want Truth," I cried, "Truth as you honestly believe." And I started to beat my hands together. Not only was I getting excited. I was hurt and outraged by the knife-blades of condescension this cocky metal fellow could plant in his words.

"I could just say I won't quite know the calculated Truth until I get back from this trip," he said. "But I'll tell you now what I think. As to where he is, I believe there must be some part of the Road in any place where true sons of knowledge have uncompromisingly quested for calculable reality, for they have left there a segment of final determinable Truth. And that Road we track onward toward the goal.

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The complete essence of him is an ever-watchful Eye that, in the coldest splendors of silence, awaits us. Testing and probing we approach, and he, the Watcher, never moves, never speaks, but looks for us from his place in those last deep fields of determinable things. Light for his glances bides in test tubes yet to be devised; life for his thoughts hatches in formulas the barest essences of which you have not yet dreamed. In short, he is a splendid majesty on a distant throne, though he be a billion times less large than half a small steel bur. Brilliance incarnate surrounds him in his clothes, and yet there are no wasteful trappings there of jeweled decorations. His radiance is that final piercing light of Calculated Truth before which all of us must stand barren, incomplete and useless as any unformed thing until at length we SEE and SEEING are as one with the Eye of Calculable Reality, which is physical truth, which is TRUTH!" After that long and glittery speech he gazed wildly at me, like the lost curves of blind eyeballs bulging out toward night. "And I know I am right," he bragged.

"Perhaps you're really on entirely quite a wrong track," I attempted to suggest to him. But he was so full of himself that my words were only sounds.

Then he left me there, and he rose on the fin-wade of his space-walk until he was just a spot in the sun. Before he disappeared he paused awhile in the sunlight to switch to his runners-in-space, and then he hurried on till his relation with the Earth's sun was nothing, and the Earth's moon was some small and negligible smudge he had forgotten past many cold worlds. He went until I didn't know where he went. He was gone quite a long long time.

MANY days later I chanced near that place again, idled beneath the same tree, and the weather was still drowsy-warm though it was autumn-late. I was surprised to have him come back, and surprised at how he came back. I could see he had been a long way and through pain. A big battle I supposed had been waged somewhere in gray cold fields where even the light turned back. His flesh had a black smashed look, half a fin was gone, and his hair had quite been lost somewhere—Out There. "Did you meet some friends? Did you find that King?" I asked.

He stared, singed eyeballs bulged. Something in his eyes tried to remember or struggled, perhaps, to forget. He shook his head in bafflement after awhile. "Something happened," he mumbled, "something—seems almost I stood aside to watch how I did

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in a battle that I myself fought."

I started to beat my hands together. I began to jump up and down. "Tell me! tell me!" I clamored. "Let me hear how you lost."

He raised his head then to speak, his voice thick with defeat's heavy weariness. "I arrived there," he said, "where the bright island of Final Truth was supposed to have been dispatched to meet us. And there was not anything—nothing but vast and ringing hollowness that held neither darkness nor light. But I stood awhile alone there waiting where emptiness spun in colors that were all blue or bluey-green. Then, for I couldn't turn back, I moved on into the wild hollowness, so by myself—creeping where I had thought to ride as a Captain in the glowing train of a King. High up to the last fields I climbed, and I held forth the Searcher's hand—all that was left of me—in a cold still place where the curves of all Creation must have coned in. And all seemed going well for most of one great instant; I thought it was going to work. I could see the fingers of many another Searcher feeling toward my own hand, and I trusted that all came in friendship. I was confident that I was destined to be a member of the Captains soon, joyous before a King."

His gaze fell down to the ground, slid past the trembling wrecks of hands that he held a little upthrust in a gesture. When he spoke again I pitied him, though I hated most that he stood for. "No one had come as true friend," he whispered. "we had each come with a secret deep-down hope, the wish to be the First Greatest." Then he raised his eyes to mine, and I shuddered at what I saw. "From every curve-whorl of those high fields," he cried, "the Searchers' hands reached for each other in a spasm of hooked and clutching fingers. We leapt in from all angles, and we fought, till that last place of almost nothing, calculable, came alive with"—and he spoke in whispers now—"with the wrath, I guess, of our God."

HIS head sank down to his chest and the wind washed past him, wind that I felt, a pleasant little breeze. "So you couldn't quite do it!" I shouted. "AND I WAS RIGHT IN WARNING YOU THAT YOU WERE ON THE WRONG TRACK!" I started to clap my hands. I began to dance.

He looked at me hard, and I could see that metal muscles still trembled along his blackened and smashed tinniness. I was almost afraid. But I looked him back hard, and I wasn't so very much afraid. His head sank again to his chest; the breeze slipped past his wrinkled ears and pushed at his broken hands. "No, I couldn't

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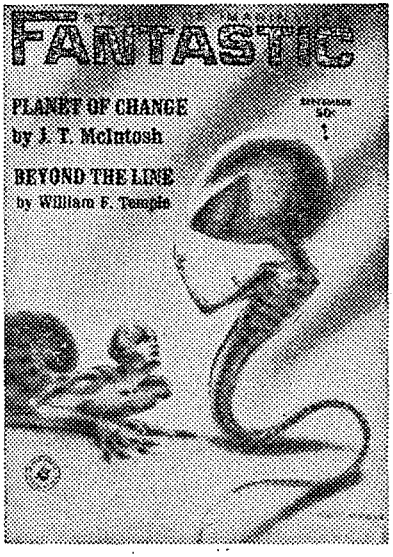
do it," he said. "I couldn't quite find what I had hoped for at the place where all curves came together, on the last calculable fields."

"And now you'll go?" I asked. "Really—far away?"

He looked at me like the last glint of a sheet of steel before the sun goes down. "I'll go," he said, "for indeed that is all that I can do. Just say my time was ended in a doomed last try for it all. Seems there's a little something Out There that finally and always must hang a little removed from the search of our Search. Or maybe a great big Something somewhere has always been pushing at us. Anyway, though I have found much, I have not found . . ." He gazed at the sun for a little while, shaking his head. Then he turned and was suddenly gone . . . and I was up and dancing. **THE END**

COMING NEXT MONTH



J. T. McIntosh headlines the September issue of FANTASTIC with Planet of Change, a novelet about a world where things are not always what they seem. . . . and veteran **William F. Temple** returns with Beyond the Line, a story of a love that crossed forbidden boundaries.

The September FANTASTIC also concludes **John Jakes'** novel, When the Idols Walked. Other stories, plus our usual features, will round out an issue not to be missed.

The September FANTASTIC goes on sale August 20.

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FAMILY PORTRAIT

By MORGAN KENT

A new writer with a deft touch tells, quietly, of an ordinary evening at home, with Mother, Father and Baby. All routine. Except Baby is a quick learner.

SHE put down her sewing.

"You haven't listened to a word I've said all evening," she said.

"The last thing you said," he replied from behind his newspaper, "Was, 'so . . . that Morrison woman said to me . . .' "

"She's putting on weight, too."

"Oh? I hadn't noticed."

He read a few more paragraphs, but his attention was diverted.

"Well? Come on, what did Mattie Morrison say? I'm all agog," he said patiently.

"You look all agog."

"Oh, for heaven's sake. Look at me. Agog, agog, agog."

She picked up her sewing, and peered at it.

"I don't think I'll ever be able to make a hem-line as well as she can. I'll say that for her, anyway." She made a face and began picking out the stitches. "In any case, that woman had the nerve to tell me DON'T WRITE ON THE WALL!"

He jumped.

"That's a heck of a thing to say . . .", he began.

"Not me," she said, her voice rising. She pointed, and said, "HIM!"

He turned, and looked over his shoulder, and then roared, "Mr. Christian, come here!"

Mr. Christian, age two years and six months, scrambled to his feet, and stood carefully in front of the scribbles on the wall. He smiled engagingly.

"Well, Sir? Explain yourself."

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The boy recognized the tone that meant, 'I'll fix it later, Brat, but right now you better show your Mother that you're sorry!' and he launched himself into a complicated explanation in which only about one word in three was decipherable. The general drift appeared to be that it wasn't really his fault, it was two other little boys that did it, and anyway, he was sorry, and was he gonna get a s'ankin'?

"Don't tempt me," his father growled. "Isn't it time for him to go to bed?"

"Past time."

"I thought so. All right, Microwatt. Go to bed. Go directly to bed. Do not pass Go. Do not collect Two Hundred Dollars."

"No!" said Mr. Christian.

His father put down his paper.

"I no s'eepy!" said Mr. Christian, and he retreated a step.

His father stood up.

"I hungee!" wailed Mr. Christian, his voice rising, and he trotted to the hallway.

HIS father glowered at him, and took a step in his direction.

The boy howled miserably, and tried the ultimate delaying tactic.

"I gotta go Potty!"

"No you don't," his mother said positively. "You go right to bed."

Mr. Christian's bright little face vanished from the hall doorway like a blown out candle. They heard him giggle as he shuffled his sleeper slippers down the hall.

"Really, Darling. You've got to be firm with that little stinker. He plays you like his wind-up teddy bear."

"I am firm. You saw the way he took off for bed?"

"After I yelled at him."

"He was going anyway," the father said, as he settled down and picked up his paper. "Now, *Please* tell me what The Morrison said."

Then little Chris, elaborately casual, trotted back into the living room. His father's eyebrows rose as he watched the boy sit down by his toys, obviously prepared for a long, happy stay.

He cleared his throat, and with exaggerated patience, asked, "And, uh, what, pray tell, are *you* doing back in here?"

"I no s'eep."

"That's true," his father mused.

"An' no light my room."

"Ah."

"An" a mon'ser my bed, Daddy."

"A Monster in your bed? Oh, dear me."

Christian nodded absently. He was busy with his toys.

"All right, Private. On your feet. Let's go. Hup! Two, three, four! Move! I'll go fight off your monster, and turn on the night-

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light. Come on, O' pestiferous One."

The boy got up dutifully, kissed his mother good-night and followed his father down the hall into his room.

"See, Daddy? Dark!"

"So it is, ol' Buddy. I'll just turn on the lamp, like this, and then you'll see that there ain't no Mon . . . YIKE!"

"See, Daddy? Mon'ser!"

And a monster there was. A reeking, wobbling, flacid horror that grinned, toothily, and gibbering like a mad-woman, eased itself from under the bolster, and scrabbled awkwardly across the bed towards him.

CHRISTIAN'S mother looked up from her sewing as her husband stepped stiffly back into the living room.

"The Brat in bed?" she asked.

He nodded, jerkily.

"There *was* a monster in his bed."

"What?"

"A great, ugly, black thing."

"Now really, Darling. You're as bad as that boy."

"No, dammit! It was there!"

She tapped her teeth with a fingernail, and looked reflective.

"I guess he could be starting now. I was three when I started. A great big, soft-nosed pony, Mother said. I guess he could be starting early for his age. Remember, he walked early, too."

"Horrible damn thing. What has that kid been watching on T.V. anyway?"

"Just his regular kiddie programs in the morning," she said.

"I wish I would have taken my camera in there," he said thoughtfully. "Old Houseman, and his five year old. He claims she can fly, now. Wait 'till he hears about this."

"And he always was a fast child. He was on table food a lot eariler than the other little ones on the block." She carried on, with her thought uninterrupted. "And your Mother, on her last Visitation, said something about you starting early, too. Hung a huge fire-ball in the living room when your father's boss came to call."

"Scorched his mustache, too," he replied. He stepped to the wall, and inspected the scribbles his son had made. "Does three dots, a long squiggle, and four curved lines have any particular significance to you?"

"That child will never be a Michelangelo," she sighed heavily. "Is he asleep now?"

"Yeah. I put his 'mon'ser' away, and he was almost asleep when I left the room," he answered, and frowned at the marks on the wall. They slowly faded.

"You left a little bit, down there, in the corner," his wife said. **THE END**

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FOOTNOTE TO AN OLD STORY

When myth meets myth, something's got to gifth . . . oops, give . . .

By JACK SHARKEY

Illustrator FINLAY

HERBERT NEWTON weighed precisely ninety-seven pounds at the age of thirty-six, and his resemblance to the *"Before"* ads in health magazines did not end there. He was likewise barely of average height, his eyes were set rather too close to one another, and beneath his near-skeletal frame lurked the timorous soul of a rabbit. Therefore, nature having played him such an unkindly trick physically, it came as no surprise to him that the joke did not halt there; he was further encumbered with a heart capable of a degree of fierce emotion comparable to that of three men twice his size, and —to make matters worse—an object on which to focus that seething sunburst of impalpable passion.

After many years of assiduous scrimping, he had put enough of his income away to afford this Mediterranean vacation. (His work was in keeping with his appearance: He was a clerk in a tiny second-hand bookstore in Manhattan.) He hadn't known what he was seeking, (consciously known, at any rate) leaving a rather gray April three thou-

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sand miles behind him and sailing, first-class since he might never again have the opportunity even for steerage, to the bluest of inland waters, to a tiny island not much larger than the Central Park of his home city, an island thrusting up through ancient waters midway between Israel and the coast of Greece. Here on the island, in a small but pleasantly sunny and airy hotel—hardly more than an inn—Herbert Newton had found love, but as yet, after passing one of the three months he would stay there, no means of requiting it.

The focal point of his overlarge emotions was called Maude, a name commensurate with the sort of girl one would expect a man like Herbert to crave; however, this girl was everything a Maude should not be. Her age he guessed to be somewhere in the middle twenties. Her face, throat, arms and legs were all the warm, healthy tones that go, in the conglomerate, by the inadequate appelation of "Copper". She had a tigerish stride when she walked, her lovely limbs flashing in the very full view given them by inadequate white tennis shorts, sleeveless white blouse, and straw-colored rope sandals whose fragile thongs enwrapped ankles of consummate symmetry, delicacy and perfection. Against the soft-butter-yellow omnipresence of liquid sunlight that lay in shimmering warmth on amber beaches and dusty green olive groves and cream-colored masonry, she wore a pair of bottle-green sunglasses with white plastic frames, the temple-clutching side-pieces tucked neatly into the shingle-cut secrecies of crisp blonde hair. Her teeth when she smiled—and this heart-stopping phenomenon happened often—shone like hard white alabaster through the proscenium of her soft, rust-red lips. Herbert would have loved her no less had her name been Hepzibah.

HER surname was Greekish and contained seven sibilant syllables which Herbert had never been able to master, but since his reveries ran toward schemes involving a dropping of this weighty label and a subsequent substitution of "Newton", he went to a little trouble to learn it spending most of his waking hours in the cool green shadows of the parlor bar, sipping at some resinous Grecian vintage and pondering plan upon plan as to how this reverie might be made a reality.

Maude lived on the island, but not at the inn, though a large allotment of her hours was spent there, at least on the grounds, infrequently indoors at the bar, always in the company of some husky young athletic type, as

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coppery, lithe, and animal-healthy as herself, while Herbert could only sit silently and watch, his heart thudding like a lion's while his skinny body shrank like that of a very small mouse.

He watched her on the tennis courts, her racquet a flashing blue as she defeated all comers; on the surface of the purple-blue sea, her water-skis sparkling with hissing wetness as she zig-zagged dizzily back and forth over deep trough and foaming wake of the tow-boat; twinkling like a golden nymph through the sun-dappled shadows of a eucalyptus grove, with some blundering young swain in laughing pursuit. And Herbert could only sit and sip wine and eat his oversized heart out.

SOMETIMES, when she sat in the small, cool parlor bar, catching her breath from her most recent exertion, clinking tall, ice-filled glasses with her latest escort, giving vent to a deep-seated throaty laugh at some whispered familiarity, swiveling suddenly about on the high stool to survey the sea through the tall, paneless casement of the single window, Herbert almost worked up the courage to move. But his plans were nebulous, futile things whose very insanity rooted him to his chair. Mostly, his schemes consisted of a sudden lunge that would bring him to her side, then a wild grapple with her slim young body, followed by a mad rush out into the warm indigo night with her feebly struggling form held close in his arms, out into darkness and warm night breezes and grassy groves where the worshippers of Pan once danced— His plans never quite allowed themselves to formulate further. Even so far as they went, they were hollow mockeries. For even so lissome a lass as Maude easily weighed more than Herbert Newton could ever hope to carry, and one stinging slap, powered by her athletic little arm, would knock him, he knew, to the floor, probably with a nosebleed. Or even worse—the worst possibility of all, as a matter of fact—he might be able to outgrapple her, might be able to carry her off into the night, might be startling enough in his sudden action to preclude her having time to think of aiming a blow at him, might get her out into darkness and warmth and romantic solitude— Only to have her laugh at him. And that would be worse than any physical pain. If she laughed at him, Herbert would die; of shame, of chagrin, and mostly of stark, inescapable realization of his own inadequacies as a possible mate for this incredibly perfect young goddess. "A cat," he mused miserably, "may look at a queen, but a mouse, never."

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AND so, day succeeded day, and night night, and Herbert sat in the same corner and drank the same resinous wine and soon stood to develop permanent indentations of woven rattan on his tiny behind if some more concrete plan did not occur to him. And then, when his stay was just entering its sixth week, an unwonted ticklish sensation at the backs of his ears told him that he was overly in need of a haircut, though the fact that this rather pedestrian necessity was about to influence the entire course of his mousy life did not at this moment occur to him. (To Herbert's credit it must be stated that it is unlikely that such a fact would have occurred to anybody else, either.) He approached the bartender as he had approached everything in his thirty-six unhappy years, timidly, and asked where he might get a haircut. He used the word "might" from habit; a person of Herbert's temperament and stature could never be certain of anything, even service at a barbershop. He was told the locale, but also informed that the barber would not be on duty until the following afternoon, so having nothing better to do, he ordered more wine and went back to his corner to sigh some more. However, the entrance of Maude and another laughing young man—he never saw her with the same youth twice—at this precise moment made him more heartsick than ever, and when they began telling shaggy dog stories, he took it as a personal, ill-veiled reference to his bad need of barbering, and, leaving his drink undrunk, retired upstairs to his room.

It turned out to be earlier than he had supposed (time tends to drag when one is constantly paddling about in deep, sad wells of self-pity), barely nine P.M., and Herbert (who was cursed with, as if things weren't bad enough, insomnia) decided to entreat the approach of Morpheus by a perusal of something deep and philosophical. It was by chance that he happened to pick up the thick black volume that had lain untouched till now on his nightstand, and still by chance that he happened to open it to "The Book of Judges", but it was by quite deliberate effort on his part that he began to read—at first casually, then curiously, and finally with an intensity that would not have been broken by a violent earthquake—the story of Samson.

He read it through, three times, savoring all the reckless, glorious wonder of that fervent history, from the parental pledge through scissored betrayal to final flare of superhuman destruction. Each time, though, his deepest thoughts clutched at the

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crucial, pivotal prop of the narrative: The relentless correlation between hair and huskiness, mane and manliness, tresses and triumph.

FINALLY putting the book aside, Herbert went to his small private bathroom and studied his ragged-edged hairline in the mirror. Were such things still possible? His last haircut had been on the boat, three days before docking. At the end of his remaining six weeks on the island, if he held off from further tonsorial tampering with his locks, he would have a really respectable head of hair. Herbert's hair, he discovered with a wild flutter of joy, was easily his best feature, though one neglected by him until this moment, due to its unfortunate choice of wearer. It was thick, raven's-wing black, and glossily healthy. True, he had not made the Nazarite vow (whatever *that* was!) mentioned in Samson's saga, nor had his shortsighted parents made it for him, but still —Vow or no vow, Samson had uprooted that pagan temple quite nicely once his hair had returned to its former length, had he not? So wasn't it possible. . . . ?

Herbert could hardly continue the thought, so wildly was his body trembling at the impudence of his imaginings. He spun around, looking in all directions for something on which to initiate his theory. Set into the stonework of his windows were a quintet of ornamental vertical bars made of soft iron, it is true, but far beyond the muscular endeavors of Herbert Newton, in any case. To these he took himself, now, grasping the cool metal in his bony fists and tugging until the sweat-dampened seams along the armpits of his shirt began to snap, thread by sticky thread. His bulging eyes he forced to stay riveted upon the slim cylinders in his grasp, seeking the slightest shift, the merest change, the most miniscule of alterations in their position.

And the bars moved. Just a quarter-inch, it must be said, but that was just a quarter-inch further than Herbert really expected them to budge.

Panting exultantly, he staggered back from the casement and collapsed onto the bed, chuckling weakly at the ceiling until, still clothed and with the lights still on, he fell into a deep, dreamless slumber.

Golden light beating warmly against his eyelids wakened him, and Herbert Newton sat up with a grunt, staring blankly at the blinding sunrise that vied with, and overmastered, the dully glowing bulbs in his wall sconces. Herbert, dreading a reprimand from the clerk downstairs, hastened to the wall switch beside

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the door and turned them off, then ran his hands distractedly through his hair, which lay dankly across his forehead, eyes, and half the skinny length of his nose. The unconscious gesture reminded him of the night before, and he moved swiftly to the window to see if it had been but the delusion of a mind already dizzied by unwonted physical strain. But the bars were still a quarter-inch out of line, and a glow equivalent to that engendered by a double scotch on an empty stomach pervaded him from lush black topknot to tiny twisted toes. "It *can* happen!" he begged his credulity. "It can. It must!"

Rummaging through his bureau until he found a seldom-utilized tube of commercial hair pomade, he managed to get his uncut locks coerced neatly against his temples and flush with his skull behind the ears, and even smoothly conforming to the curve of the nape of his neck, not unlike—he realized gaily as he studied what could be seen of his profile in the mirror with his neck twisted nearly beyond the sideward capabilities of his eyes—the sort of style worn by Johnny Weissmuller in the *Tarzan* movies, a series of escapist-type films which Herbert—a natural-born escapist—knew by heart from local theater—and later TV—viewings of same.

HE was summarily startled—but not, on consideration, surprised—to find that the cuffs of his trousers no longer quite reached the topside of his shoelaces. "I may," he hoped aloud, "be growing a bit taller!" Returning his gaze to the mirror once more, he knotted his little fists, and raised his elbows to the horizontal, to see what, if any, effects were apparent in the region of his biceps. What he saw there appeared, as usual, to be a pair of small, almost invisible swellings, not unlike twin pimples laid atop matching lengths of uncooked spaghetti. But, to his sharply narrowed eyes, it was apparent that these pimples were a little nearer in size to small carbuncles. This observation he found to be fully as thrilling as the analogy was unappetizing. Whistling with unaccustomed gaiety, he made his way downstairs for breakfast.

The waiter there raised an eyebrow just a trifle when Herbert appeared. What with his insomnia, and consequent sleeping late after finally collapsing into weary slumber, this was the first time he had entered the dining room before noon in all his six weeks'. stay. But the waiter showed him to his assigned table and duly handed over the menu, in a gesture unconsciously calculated to place before Herbert's eyes the side of the menu spe-

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cializing in breakfasts which ran to the prune-juice-black-coffee-and-figs school of antemeridian nourishment. He was startled, therefore, to hear Herbert (after contemptuously dropping the menu unread onto the tablecloth) order, extemporaneously, "Four eggs, sunny side up, at least a dozen small pork sausages, crisp, three waffles with lots of butter and syrup, eight slices of toast with jam, a pint of orange juice, well-iced, and at least a half-gallon of coffee, accompanied by a lot of heavy cream and a full sugar bowl."

"You—You are expecting a companion?" hazarded the waiter, nervously, since to his rapidly calculating mind the order augured to weigh almost as much as the orderer.

"Not just yet," said Herbert, with a secret smile. "But soon, soon." The waiter had to content himself with this cryptic utterance as he hurried off to present the chef with a mystery they would mull over for days.

BY the end of the seventh week of his stay, an increasingly hirsute Herbert had become the whispered topic of all conversation at the hotel. This mouse of a man who had registered such a short time back was changing, strangely, before their eyes. From one day to the next, there was no telling how he would look when he sauntered (Herbert sauntered, now) into the dining room for breakfast. His food-intake, three days after that first mystifying morning, had doubled in bulk, and the chef found he had to increase his supply list to ensure having enough on hand to accommodate the other guests as well.

Herbert, however, no longer hung about the corner of the bar, sipping wine. He did not intend that Maude see him in the varying stages of his development. He wanted to, as it were, *spring* himself upon her as a full-grown, monstrously perfect male specimen. True, the daily lengthening of his hair began to be an annoyance to him, adding a solitary note of effeminacy to what was otherwise fiercely male, but his attitude toward this slight drawback softened once he realized that no one (no one in his right mind) makes a crack about a fellow man who has to duck four inches to pass beneath a high door-lintel, and whose shoulders brush both jambs of that doorway simultaneously in passing. Herbert realized that he could, had he desired, have gone so far as to sport a pink ribbon atop his head, and not a word nor even a whisper would have cast aspersions upon his masculinity, any more than a pleated pinafore about the haunches of an approaching Bengal tiger.

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BY the end of the eighth week, the bars at the window of Herbert's room were lying in frightened metal knots atop his dresser, and the iron handle of his door was deeply fluted where its surface had buckled upward between his fingers once during his too-hearty grasp before turning it, and Herbert himself had had to purchase an entire new wardrobe via a tailor in the nearby village, who was only too glad to make his clothing to order, since his materials were charged for by the gross yardage.

It was the first week in June when once again Herbert descended to the parlor bar of an evening, betook himself to his former observation post, and had the kowtowing bartender leave not only the glass of wine but the bottle from which it had been poured at his table. There, drinking in slow, thoughtful sips, he awaited the appearance of Maude. (By now, in the new-found forcefulness which comes of having a fantastically powerful frame, he had decided to change not only her surname but her given name as well. He rather hoped, when he presented his plan to her, that she would argue the point; it would give added spice to her struggle against his ultimate conquest.)

He was on his second glassful when Maude made her appearance. Her sun-bronzed limbs shone glowingly against the backdrop of the shadowy bar, her dark green sunglasses masking the direction her eyes might be gazing as she (in company with a rugged young male, "The beach-bum type," as Herbert instantly categorized) seated herself nimbly upon the stool and let her escort place their order. But he knew when those hidden orbs were full upon him. He could feel the heightened interest like a tangible wave of warmth flashing from her to bounce lightly off his face; he saw, too, the slight gaping of her lips about those perfect teeth, and the extra tautening about the breast of her blouse as her breath caught in her lungs. Her would-be swain was talking to her, earnestly, in low whispers, but Herbert could tell she wasn't getting a word of it.

Satisfied that he had made the intended impact upon her, he looked away as though disinterested, yawned behind the back of a massive hand, then arose and strolled out into the balmy Mediterranean night without so much as another glance in her direction. He proceeded down the dirt path toward the eucalyptus grove, but paused on a rugged promontory that giddily overhung the surging ocean, that he might be the better seen by her when—making some excuse to her escort—she came out after him. And he knew she would

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come. It is only small, uncertain men who plan abductions. Abductions always presuppose some unwillingness on the part of the female. Herbert knew that no female who once set eyes upon his new, rock-hard physique would be unwilling for a moment.

Tiny feet scuffed rapidly up the path, then slowed.

"Oh, hello there!" said Maude. Herbert turned to her without smiling, though he was vastly amused by the false note of surprise in her voice. She was, he discovered, even more lovely by moonlight. Twin replicas of the full, golden moon shone at him from the surfaces of her sunglasses, giving her an unreal aspect, as of some intricately wrought wax figure with incandescent bulbs set into hollow eye-sockets.

WORDLESSLY, he held out a hand, and then her own was reaching forward, pressing delicate fingers tightly into his palm before his own fingers closed over them, and then she was in his arms, a slender, warm writhing powerhouse of trembling emotion. His lips pressed savagely down upon her mouth, and she gave a muted hum of thrilling pain as he drew her all the more tightly against his massive chest. Herbert finally pulled his face away from hers, released her from his embrace, but maintained his unbreakable grip upon her hand. Smiling down at her, he started to draw her down the path toward the rustling darkness of the eucalyptus grove. And she held back.

"Why not?" he questioned her tacit refusal.

"It's too—primitive," she said, with a little laugh. "Rough ground, and sand, and itchy grass, and bugs . . ." She gave a little shiver of revulsion.

"Then where?" he said, his tone almost surly, willing—if this little creature were daring to play coy with him, *him!*—to release her hand and go seek out greener pastures, for now *all* pastures were green for Herbert Newton. He could possess any girl, in any city of any country anywhere in the world.

"My place," she said softly, and his momentary spate of annoyance passed. There was no mistaking the desire in her voice, even in the short space of those two words. She wanted him, really wanted him, with a desperation that made their frenzied moment of abandon a moment before only the prelude to something so titanic that Herbert found even his new body shivering in contemplation.

"What are we waiting for?" he said.

* * *

Her house was a mile from the village, on a cliff almost directly

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opposite the point at which the hotel hung above the pounding seas, the opposite shore of the island. It was a very large house, one he had never seen except at a distance, during the single time he'd taken a stroll in his easily-fatigued former stage of development. It was a neat combination of modern architecture with classical design, and he made some joke about it being "like putting plumbing into the Parthenon", then joined her in the laughter this statement evoked. There was a certain wild something in her laughter that made him wonder if perhaps, by the most marvelous contrivance of an altered fate, he had not—in the person of this girl—stumbled serendipitously into the greenest of all possible pastures. A man such as Herbert Newton had become would still have far to search before again finding such a perfect complement to his masculine perfection.

The living room of this place was pillared, and circular, a wider-than-elsewhere gap between the towering pillars opening onto a moonlighted court, in whose center a fountain soared and shimmered and sighed from the mouth of a pitcher that was clutched in the hands of a marble triton, then, reaching its apogee, curved and fell back onto the white marble face, along the thick, cold white shoulders, thence runneling along the length of the well-defined scales in the curling fishtail, before dribbling musically into the broad pool surrounding the supporting pedestal. Herbert allowed his blithely smiling hostess to lead him past, then beyond, this lovely construction, and to a curving marble bench draped with a silver-trimmed black material which seemed to be velvet, but proved even softer when he reclined upon it, at her gentle insistence.

"It's lovely," he said. "Incredibly lovely. It's of another world, another time."

"Atmosphere," she laughed lightly, appreciative of his appreciation. "When I'm here, I like to think that this is long, long ago, back in the ancient days, the days before steam-engines and hydrogen bombs, before Hippocrates began meddling with medical sciences, back into the time of only earth, air, fire and water, of Apollo's sun-chariot arcing across the heavens, of the Minotaur feasting on the flesh of the unlucky wanderer in the labyrinth, of—" She stopped, and flushed, suddenly. "I'm sorry, I get carried away, sometimes, when I'm out here," she said contritely.

"Don't be," he said. "I feel the same way, really I do." He waved a hand to take in the excellent statuary filling the niches between the pillars of the open-

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ceiled court. "How else could you feel, here among these ancient gods?" He was about to expostulate further in her defense when a slight motion, barely at the rim of his perception, drew his gaze that way and halted his tongue. He found himself staring at a blue-white marble balcony, overhanging the court just above the entrance into the living room. The rear of the balcony was a wide archway, veiled by silver-and-black draperies akin to those on which he reclined. He could not be absolutely certain, but— Something had just dipped back from view between those soft hanging folds.

CATCHING the direction of his gaze, Maude suddenly laughed. "Not private enough for you?" she said, taking his hand and drawing him to his feet once more. "We'll go inside, then. No one can spy on us in the living room."

"But who—?" he said vaguely, allowing himself to be led back indoors, where a crystal decanter of wine awaited the two of them on an ornately carven sideboard. "I don't know why I assumed so much, but—I sort of imagined you lived alone."

"Unfortunately, I do not," she said, pouring twin drinks into tall crystal goblets. "I live here with my sisters. They are quite jealous of me."

Halting before voicing his first-reaction response, an imprudent, "I can see why!", Herbert simply echoed, "Jealous?"

"Well, it's a family thing," she said, handing him his drink, pressing him into a plumply upholstered armchair, then insinuating herself cozily beside him on the arm. "They are old, extremely old, and they resent my being younger. There's no helping it, I guess. It's been a long time since either of *them* was in a man's arms, whereas *I*—" Once again, she flushed, closing her lips over what was obviously about to be a definite indiscretion. It didn't matter much what they knew—or suspected—about one another, just so neither gave the knowledge or suspicion voice. "Bottoms up," she appended lamely, clinking her goblet to his, then tilting her head back and draining every last drop of the wine.

Herbert followed suit, allowed her to refill his goblet, then sit beside him again, though he made a mental note not to take too much, lest he find himself too besotted to be of any romantic value, later on.

"Tell me about yourself," he urged, softly. "One thing that puzzles me immensely about you is your name."

She looked curiously at him, then spoke her seven-syllable surname with a rising inflection.

"No, no," he laughed. "Not

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that. I mean your given name, Maude. How in the world did you ever get stuck with a monicker like that? Or did your sisters have something to do with it?"

"I wish I *could* put the blame on them," she sighed, "but they are quite guiltless. 'Maude' is just an English version of my name, which is fully as Greek as my surname. It's not so pretty, but it's the closest I could come."

"Oh?" he said, languorously, blinking hard to remain alert; whatever sort of wine this was, it had a tendency to soothe muscle and flesh like a hot, relaxing bath. "What *is* your right name?"

She told him. Herbert frowned. It had a familiar ring to it, but she, of course, gave it a well-bred Greek pronunciation that did not quite match the sounds he would have recognized in their anglicized version. But it took him only a second to cross-translate. Then he was on his feet, his face a mask of fury. "That's a hideous joke to make!" he raged, hurling the half-filled goblet away from him to shatter against the marble wall. "If you think you can con me into a cheap scare—!"

But she was apparently enjoying his wrath as she backed away from him, mocking laughter ringing through the pillared splendor of the room. "That's it!" she said. "Why don't you raise a fist at me?! Just a bit more left eyebrow, please!" Dizzy from the wine, barely able to lurch after her graceful, coaxing retreat, Herbert found himself doing as he was bidden. His hand upraised into a thick-tendoned, knotted fist, his left eyebrow arched just a fraction higher.

"Just like Jove!" she exulted. "Exactly like Jove! That's who you'll be! You're too marvelously perfect!"

Herbert continued his uncertain pursuit, stumbling after her lithe form as it danced away, always out of reach. Beads of perspiration broke out upon his brow as he realized she was glancing upward toward an empty niche, just the right size to contain him.

"Please—!" he blurted, and then his tongue stopped as her soft, tiny hands shot upward and —in one smooth motion—removed the dark green sunglasses simultaneously with the soft blonde fashion wig. The second-to-last thing Herbert Newton saw was the horrible, hissing green cluster that was her serpent-hair. Then he looked at last into the unveiled blood-chilling eyes.

THE END

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Dangerous Flags

Another Adventure of the Green Magician

By THOMAS M. DISCH

Fantasy? You want Fantasy?

All right, then, take This!

ONCE, long ago, in Pennsylvania, there was a little mining town called Mean because everyone there tended to approach the median. Life in Mean was nasty, brutish, short, and inelegant. Yet in other important respects it was no different from your own. Men labored and women labored and children learned. Except when the seasons changed, one day was just like another. Then one bright summer day all the angleworms began to die.

"Is it the plague?" asked the aldermen.

The committee decided it was not the plague. They didn't know *what* it was, but, after all, nobody really cares about worms.

Then the houses of Mean began to fill with a peculiar smell, like the smell of a scientific experiment, and hamsters began to die in the cellars.

"Stamp out hamsters!" cried a few rash people.

The committee investigated and discovered what was causing the deaths of worms, hamsters, cats, dogs, and even a few rash people. It was this:

Coal Gas!

For, deep below the streets of Mean, in unremembered tunnels cut nookshotten through the bowels of the Earth, the deadly fumes of Coal Gas were burning.

Coal Gas!

The fiery fumes seeped upwards through the ground, as coffee percolates through coffee grounds, and poisoned first worms, then hamsters, and at last old women in their beds. Nothing, no one, escaped the deadly virulence, and day after day the fires raged unabated in the old coal mines, releasing new deadliness.

Coal Gas!

Fires gnawed at the very fiber of the Earth, consuming in big lumps the veins of anthracite and causing strange collapses

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everywhere. Gaping holes appeared where highways met. Whole houses sank below their lawns, and deep moats suddenly were noticed in front of the Methodist Church. It was beautiful and scary.

"This is crazy!" said a vestryman in an interview with the press.

"It can't go on like this," said one housewife, "or we will all die!"

And so a Town Meeting was called, and it drew the best attendance that any Town Meeting had drawn since the School Bond Issue had been put to a vote.

"Our very lives are at stake," the little housewife referred to above insisted as soon as the Meeting began. "We must put out the fire to save our very lives."

"Don't Be Silly!" came a Voice from the back of the Hall. The eyes of the assembly turned to regard the mysterious English Teacher who had spoken.

She, too, was beautiful and scary. Her fingernails were the color of almonds and her eyes were the color of burnt almonds. She smoked mentholated philtre-tip cigarettes, inhaling deeply and exhaling evenly through two tiny nostrils. When she spoke her voice popped the silence like a gray balloon.

"There is no need for mere Alarmism. This is the School Bond Issue all over again. Reason and not prejudice will answer all our needs. What is done cannot be undone. The Moving Finger writes, and having writ moves on." She smiled, despite herself.

HEAR! Hear!" shouted her Rich Nephew, who was sitting at her side.

"Be Quiet, Gwyon!" She continued, smirking: "Nor all your piety nor wit can Uh, change a word of it."

"But you live on top of Old Manse Hill," the little housewife objected in a voice like yours. "You don't have to worry about the Coal Gas poisoning you or your children."

"I have no children," the English Teacher replied. "And *no one* has to worry about the Coal Gas. There is no such *Thing* as Coal Gas."

"You Are Wrong!" came a great booming voice from still farther back in the Hall.

"Who *dares* oppose Me?" exclaimed the English Teacher.

"It is me that opposes you—me, the Green Magician."

"It is *I*," the English Teacher corrected. "Say: it is *I*."

"It is *I*," he said.

"Well I don't give a hoot whether you're green or red, Green Magician, but I'll tell you this right now—you don't know what you're talking about!"

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"Hear! Hear!" shouted her Rich Nephew.

"Be Quiet, Gwyon!"

"I have come to save this town from the burning Coal Gas, but for my services I must ask ten dollars."

"Don't be absurd," the Teacher screamed. "For ten dollars we can buy three new books for the school library."

"Let's vote! Oh, let's vote," the housewife suggested.

"No!" said the English Teacher. "Because I challenge the Green Magician here to answer three riddles first." No one at the Town Meeting opposed her. No one ever did.

"I accept," the Green Magician said, with a little bow. On top of everything else, he was quite good looking.

"Beware, Green Magician: if you cannot answer my three riddles you must leave this little mining town and never return."

He nodded in solemn agreement. A trumpet call announced the first riddle.

"To make new wine when vines are bare—" the Teacher thrust.

"Smash the old bottle!" the Magician parried.

"The Second Riddle: what is Stick-Me and Nick-Me and Lick-Me and never grows up?

The Green Magician hesitated.

"Give up?" she snarled.

"I have it," he triumphed. "Hershey Chocolates!"

"So! (Damn him!) The third riddle, then. . . ." The mysterious English Teacher laughed deep inside herself for she knew that there was *no answer* to this riddle. "—What is the sound of one hand clapping?"

The Green Magician raised one hand, his right hand, and clapped.

"I have won!" he bubbled.

"Then die!" proclaimed the English Teacher and suiting her action to her word, she hurled the butt of her mentholated philtre-tip cigarette at the Green Magician.

It struck his right temple and instantly the Green Magician exploded. Nothing was left but a sort of sticky green powder on the ground.

But the Green Magician wasn't really dead. He was only sleeping. But that was the end of the Town Meeting anyhow.

NOW as the last light glimmers to a stop in the darkened Hall, the English Teacher and Gwyon go to the spot where the Green Magician had exploded a moment ago and secretly they begin to scrape the sticky Powder from the plastic upholstery and the backs of chairs and blow it into little beige envelopes.

"This is what we'll do," the English Teacher explained to her Rich Nephew, who wasn't very bright, if truth be told, "we'll

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keep the Coal Gas burning and while the Town is worrying about the silly Pestilence, the Waterspout will destroy them all."

"What Waterspout?" Gwyon asked.

"The one on the Radio, you fool!"

For, because of the Coal Gas, no one in Mean had turned on his Radio for the weather report. The Town would be caught unprepared. That was the English Teacher's plan for destroying everyone.

"But first," the English Teacher waved her mentholated philtre-tip cigarette expressively, "*first*, we must take this Powder down to the fires in the mines. There it will be utterly consumed!" (She screamed expressively.) "And then we'll hear no more of the Green Magician! Ha! Ha! Ha!

"Follow me, my darling, my dear, into the crypts below Town Hall. Then, through a secret garden into the mine shaft, away we go."

Tip-toe, down, in darkness, down, step-by-step, together, the Unholy Pair descend.

Will all the townspeople be destroyed?

What is really in the envelopes?

And is the Green Magician dead?

But—stay!

There's still a chance for all of us, because Look: her Rich Nephew takes his little beige envelope from the pocket of his vest. He opens it. And then, unseen by his Aunt, *he eats it too soon!*

But the English Teacher isn't going to give up as easily as that. Oh no! She knows how to save her Nephew:

By reciting her three Favorite Poems!

Her first Favorite Poem is *A Psalm of Life* by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

Her second Favorite Poem is *Locksley Hall* by Alfred Lord Tennyson.

Her third Favorite Poem is *The Incubus*, and she had written it herself. This is the way it goes:

"Nightshade & Roses of rare Mutation bloom,
and wretched Blights in midnight revel dance
to the Horned god: such nights that Pluto sways
in full dominion; nights that know no stars
but His; Bats gibbering: Nights like this,
This Night now steeps the Hills in jet. Tonight
the Owl is torturing the Nightingale."

After she had recited all three poems her Nephew was safe again, and the English

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Teacher gave a sigh of relief. But their plan was partly spoiled because of the Powder, and together they drove off to Cincinnati just in time to escape the Green Magician.

"Wake, wake up, wake up
and save us, Green Magician."

That's what the magic figures in the wallpaper sang to wake up the Green Magician. And he did wake up, too, because now the English Teacher's spell was broken.

It was like that time in Arizona when the Green Magician was hypnotized by the Grand Dragon of the G.O.P. He had thought he was a Eurasian spy until the *real* spy had snapped his fingers, releasing him from his trance.

"Hurry, Green Magician, hurry
To put the burning Gas out,
Because we still have to worry
About the Waterspout."

In the dismal crypts below Town Hall, the wind whistled and the light played strange tricks on a man. It was a labyrinth, and there was only one door that would lead him to the stairs that went down to the subterranaen coal mines.

Was this the right door?

"Be careful! Watch out!
Before you take another step,
Look for the English Teacher's trap!"

No, this *wasn't* the right door. *This* was! The Green Magician ran down the steps as fast as he could run, holding his breath so that he would not inhale the deadly fumes of the Coal Gas. At the bottom of the steps, he spread a large, square, white handkerchief on the floor of the mine shaft, and, still holding his breath, he crossed his eyes and *wished very hard.*

And what do you suppose happened? That's right! The Snow Fairy appeared!

"What do you wish?" she

(*Continued on next page*)

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asked the Green Magician.

"To save the Town from the Coal Gas."

"What will you give me?"

The Green Magician gave the Snow Fairy ten dollars of his own money. Satisfied, the Snow Fairy walked right into the middle of the blazing Inferno and *waved dangerous flags* at the Coal Gas. The fire went out, and the Snow Fairy returned to her home in Fairyland.

"Thank heaven!" said the Green Magician.

The townspeople, overjoyed when they heard of the Green Magician's exploit, came down the mine shaft lickety-split and gave three cheers for the Green Magician, who had saved them, after all.

"I nominate the Green Magician to be our King," said the little housewife gratefully. "Let's vote."

Everybody voted for the Green Magician to be King. They had simply forgotten the English Teacher.

"My dear subjects," said the Green Magician, "I am delighted to be able to tell you that your old English Teacher is dead."

"Hurray!"

"And her Rich Nephew is dead, too."

"Hurrah!"

"They died together in a Labor Day accident on the Pennsylvania Turnpike."

"Well, then, let's dance!" cried the little housewife (and everybody else) in a transport of ecstasy.

And dance they did. Down in the old coal mine they all danced around the Green Magician, while the Waterspout passed harmlessly overhead. Very softly, the Green Magician sang his Favorite Song.

The Green Magician's Favorite Song is *America the Beautiful*, and now let's all of us stand up and sing it too.

THE END

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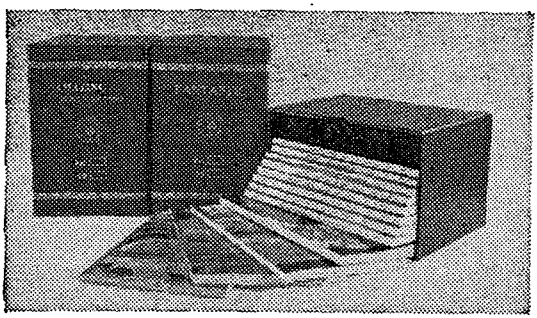

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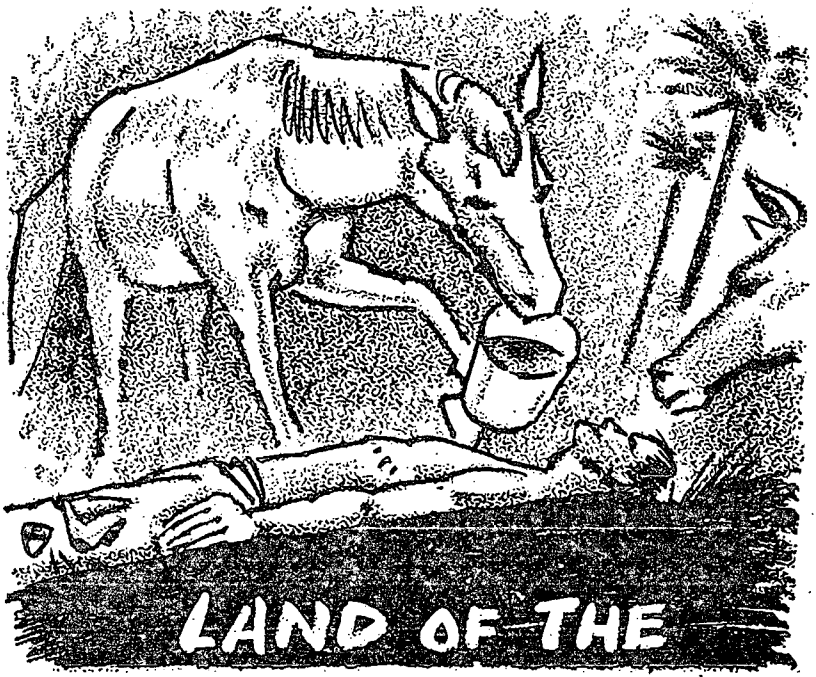

By ADAM BRADFORD, M.D.

Illustrator SCHELLING

Once again the intrepid Dr. Bradford suffers misfortune at sea, and manages to be cast up on the island where Gulliver discovered the Houyhnhnms and the Yahoos. Dr. Bradford finds that the Yahoos are more Yahoo than ever—which any fool can plainly tell without getting shipwrecked at all!

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IT was not easy for me to settle into the everyday practice of orthopedic surgery in Boston after having travelled to *Lilliput* and *Brobdingnag* and especially after having just returned from the magic island of *Glubbdubdrib*. The excitement and the adventures of the past few years seemed to be accumulative and although I was physically exhausted, I was still emotionally keyed up. For two weeks after my return I rested at my cousin's farm at Pride's Crossing and then resumed the practice of orthopedic surgery with my uncle at the Massachusetts General Hospital.

The summer passed quickly enough. I regained my strength and found my old surgical skills steadily coming back. By the fall I was secure enough in my practice to ask Penelope Choate to marry me. I am proud to relate that on Sunday, October 5, 1959, we were married in a small and quiet ceremony in the Memorial Church in Harvard Yard. After a brief honeymoon in Bermuda, we moved into a small apartment on Beacon Street overlooking the beautiful Charles River. At last I was settled into a normal life, and I was never more happy than I was then. My busy practice, which also included considerable teaching, all but crowded Gulliver out of my mind.

In the spring of 1960, my uncle asked me if I would care to deliver a paper on Total Rehabilitation (a field in which he was the outstanding authority) at the International Orthopedic Conference in New Delhi. Although I was reluctant to go off on any junket at this time, I gladly accepted his offer because it was an opportunity that I could not refuse. Not only would such a trip add to my personal prestige, but it would also bring to the attention of a world-gathering of orthopedists our pioneer efforts in total rehabilitation. The entire trip was to last only seven days; the Conference, itself, was from May 3 to May 7.

Penelope planned to stay in New York to visit friends and to do some shopping while I was away on this trip. She saw me off at Idlewild and just before I boarded the plane, she put a small wrapped object in my hand. "Just a good luck charm," she said, "in case you get lost. But hurry back. I'll miss you."

AS the jet nosed out over the Atlantic, I unwrapped the "charm" and discovered to my surprise it was the ring that *Nallgall* had given to me in *Balnibari* to give to his long-lost love, *Maria Angelica Torres* in Monterey. I was at first amused, I must admit, by my wife's playful prank; but I was later bothered by the afterthought—could

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this be some manifestation of feminine intuition? I was not planning to be anywhere near California. My trip to India was not by way of the west coast but across the Atlantic with a brief stopover in London. I thrust the ring into my pocket, picked up my briefcase containing the paper that I was going to deliver at the Conference, checked my slides, and reviewed my notes. I busied myself completely in my work.

The trip to India was completely uneventful. A three-hour stop-over at London gave me enough time to stretch my legs, get shaved, and to buy a tube of toothpaste that I had forgotten to bring along. My lecture at the International Orthopedic Conference at New Delhi was well received and stimulated considerable favorable discussion. But the trip and the many exhibits and lectures were tiring, and so, when the leading orthopedic surgeon of Java, Doctor Tjilatjap Bandung, invited me to his home in Surabaja to spend a week or so visiting and fishing, I cabled Penelope concerning my change in plans, urged her to return home, and promised that I would be back in Boston no later than June 1. Doctor Bandung was reputed to be an excellent pilot and had come to the conference in his private plane. He planned to fly first to Rangoon, then to Bangkok, and then continue south to Surabaja. After my little vacation with him, I could leisurely return home (he said) by way of the Philippines.

Doctor Bandung demonstrated his skill as a pilot on the first leg of our trip from New Delhi to Rangoon. Although we encountered a fierce electrical storm, he managed to get his plane above the clouds and the wind and to keep us on course. We spent two days visiting Rangoon with Doctor Bandung's friends and, shortly after dawn on May 11, we again taxied down the airstrip on our next leg to Surbaja. Although we didn't know it then, it was to be Doctor Bandung's last flight. And had it not been for a most remarkable stroke of luck, it could have just as easily cost me my own life.

OUR plane was over the Andaman Sea about fifty miles west of Ranong when there was a sudden burst of gunfire from a large vessel (destroyer?) below us. Doctor Bandung had mentioned something about "political enemies" the previous day, but his conversation seemed so casual that I failed to grasp its significance until that moment.

"It's *Maglang*," Bandung shouted to me, "but they won't get us," and he jerked his plane into a steep climb. The gunfire, however, had hit our tanks, our

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tail burst into flames, and before I really knew what was happening, we plummeted into the sea. Bandung, I assume, must have drowned; he was never heard from again. Miraculously, however, I freed myself from my seat and was able to cling to a section of wing that had broken off and remained afloat. With all my strength I hung on and climbed on top as if it were a raft. From other pieces of wreckage I fashioned an oar and a sail. To my happy surprise the wing section proved watertight and buoyant.

SINCE I was not too far from land, I hoped I would drift south to Sumatra or east to Malaya or, perhaps, be picked up by some fishing boat. The tides and the wind, however, carried me westerly into the Indian Ocean into what appeared as a vast emptiness of space. My predicament seemed hopeless; my condition was worse than it had ever been in any earlier adventure. Here, on the Indian Ocean, I was without compass to ascertain, my position, without food or water, without a gun or even a knife. I drifted aimlessly for two days. My hunger and thirst became unbearable; and during the third night I must have blacked out because I do not recall awakening nor do I remember anything further of my time at sea. As I try to think back and count the days, it seems that I must have drifted for another day or perhaps two.

When I finally opened my eyes, I found that I was lying on a grassy turf under a palm tree, and there were two horses standing beside me. One was holding a bucket of water in his mouth, which he tilted now and then with his right front paw pouring the water on my face so that I could drink. The other horse was pawing the ground as if he were beating out signals and was neighing in what seemed a frightened and excited fashion. The cold fresh water revived me quietly. I grabbed the bucket from the horse and practically drained it down my throat.

From the distance I now could hear other horses approaching, whinnying, braying and otherwise carrying on what seemed to be most animated conversations with each other. Through all the din and clatter and confusion, I thought that I heard word "Yahoo" repeated several times. I now knew that I must be in the country of the *Houyhnhnms*, the land that Gulliver had loved so much because of the friendly and intelligent horses that lived there. The word, "Yahoo" must be, I reasoned, the term they applied to me since that was what the horses in Gulliver's day called the bestial and degraded humans that lived in their country.

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SINCE I had for years studied Gulliver's original notes most carefully, I recalled several words of the horses' language; but I could not yet express myself clearly. I remembered, for example, that "Hhunn" meant "Go" or "March." "Gnnauyh" was some large bird of prey. "Luhimuh" was some sort of wild rat. "Yahoo" was not only a term used to designate the wild humanoids that populated the country, but also, as a *suffix*, was used like our *prefix, mal-*, to indicate something bad or ill-contrived. A hurricane, for example, was called "Lyoohnm Yahoo." Oats that had become rotten were "Lfooyl Yahoo." A fractured ankle was "Hnhnouynh Yahoo."

I tried to struggle to my feet, but I was too weak and I fell back into a small clump of bushes. By now, the horses—there were at least a dozen of them—had surrounded me almost completely, but my anxiety as to what they might do next was quickly relieved when one tan-colored mare stepped forth carrying a bucket of milk and another came quickly after her with a loaf of bread. Two others nuzzled me to help me sit up and spoke encouragingly as they nudged me to eat. I thanked them as profusely as I could and by every gesture indicated how grateful I was for their help.

In spite of the good food and the cool drinks, a wave of complete and utter exhaustion again engulfed me and I blacked out. When consciousness returned, I found myself in a large dim cave faintly illuminated by the glow of burning tallow candles. I was lying on a straw pallet and was covered by a coarse blanket. In spite of my weariness, I felt much better, and now, for the first time, began to take an active interest in my surroundings. As I raised my head off the ground, I could see seven horses looking at me curiously from the distance and, as I moved, they came forward to inspect me more closely. Their calm, solicitous attitude impressed me immediately, and I tried to speak to them.

"*Yahoo hyolly*," I said aloud pointing to myself, indicating that I was "*good*" Yahoo. "Yahoo hyolly," I repeated again and again as I tried to make friendly gestures. I arose from my seat and I patted several of them gently and as endearingly as I could. Among the group I recognized the tan mare that had brought me my bucket of milk, and I stroked her mane and said, "*Houyhnhnm hyolly*" until she neighed in response.

The cave was as clean as if it had been scrubbed daily, and as my eyes accomodated to the darkness, I could see seven other pallets of straw distributed in neat

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bundles at the further end. In addition to the mare there was a stallion, two fillies, two colts and a foal. I assumed that—and this assumption later proved to be accurate—I was a guest of a *Houyhnhnm* family and that it was probably they who had carried me somehow to their shelter or home. What impressed me most, even at this time, was the quiet order and discipline that existed in this family group. One of the fillies brought me some fruit and vegetables; another carried a bucket of milk and some uncooked oats to my bedside. Both the mare and the stallion urged me to eat. I relished the fruit and vegetables, drank the milk, and explained as best I could that I would have to refuse the oats until I could cook them. They seemed a bit surprised but in every way tried to make me understand that I was welcome in their home.

AFTER a good night's sleep, I arose to find that the mare and stallion had already left the cave and one of the colts had remained there in charge. The fillies were busy cleaning and tidying the cave and rearranging the straw pallets into neat mounds. The colt was as tall and handsome as any of the finest thoroughbreds that one sees at famous race tracks. The fillies were a bit smaller but cantered and walked around the cave with a grace that would make any movie starlet envious. The colt, who was obviously intelligent, tried to converse with me. Soon I learned several words in their language and could carry on simple conversation. In time, like Gulliver, I was able to master the difficult nasal twang that is characteristic of their speech. Once mastered, I found it to be quite beautiful, much like classical French mixed with Oriental or Chinese inflections.

As the sun's rays began to brighten up the cave, I asked my young host permission to leave but he indicated that it might be difficult or impossible for a Yahoo to do so without the help of a guide. He led me to the opening of the cave which I now discovered was at the edge of a steep and rocky hill whose sides sloped precipitously downward.

As I gazed into the valley below, my attention was attracted to what appeared to be a herd of peculiarly clothed apes, a few of which were roaming aimlessly while most of the others were busy collecting rocks which they piled into huge mounds. Suddenly, without apparent provocation, the air was shattered by wild noises and screams as one herd attacked the other, each throwing rocks at each other with a viciousness that would be incomprehensible to an ape but readily

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understandable to a civilized man. Even the herd that hadn't previously collected any rocks now began to collect them and throw them into the general fracas. Soon the air was again stilled as the bodies lay bloodied and maimed and the herds again reorganized. Then, without even waiting to remove the dead and the wounded, the survivors of each herd began to pile up the rocks again even more industriously than before. My friend, the colt, pointed his right foot to the melée below, and then put his left forefoot on my shoulder, "Yahooji," he said with a mixture of compassion and contempt.

I tried to explain to the colt that the Yahoos below us were not like the civilized men and women of my own country. I elaborated in some detail how the courts of law were employed to settle our own disputes and how international law was used to arbitrate issues among different people of different countries. Furthermore, I explained how civilized Yahoos maintained specialized groups of men, called *armies,* to fight against each other when disputes could not be settled amicably and how much more subtle and effective our lethal weapons were when compared to the barbarous act of rock-throwing of the despicable Yahoos whose violence we had just witnessed. I even stressed the excellent care that we give to the dead and the dying and the decent burial they receive. I pointed out how carefully the remains of each soldier were identified and how a decent white wooden cross was placed at each grave and how even "unknown

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soldiers" whose remains were too badly battered to be recognized were distinguished by being placed in a special grave of honor. I tried to impress upon him that our consideration for the maimed, the blinded, and the wounded was very great indeed; and in our country we provided such casualties with compensation for their misfortunes.

APPARENTLY, however, the colt failed to understand my logic and reasoning or, perhaps, my knowledge of their language was still too meagre for me to express myself adequately for, when I finished my talk, believing that my exposition was logical and convincing, the colt looked at me skeptically and uttered only one sentence, "*Yahooji huji Yahooji*," ("Yahoos are Yahoos"), he said simply and returned into the cave.

I spent the morning (as I spent several mornings thereafter) sitting at the entrance of the cave viewing the Yahoos below. That morning I witnessed three rock-throwing battles and every day thereafter I saw several similar engagements. In each instance I was impressed with the rapidity with which the rocks were gathered for the next skirmish once the exhausted and vanquished returned to their own herds. Apparently, the Yahoos have a short memory for they entered into one battle after another and did not seem to remember how futile the previous battle had been that had ended only a few hours earlier. It may also be that their sense of time is different since we usually, in a much more decent fashion, allow a new generation to grow up before we renew our own wars.

What perplexed me most during my first few days in the cafe was why the *Houyhnhnms* had made their homes in concealed caverns on the hillside rather than in the nice wooden huts that they had on the prairies in Gulliver's time. I discovered, too, that it was not only the *Houyhnhnms* who saved my life who lived this way but all the *Houyhnhnms* had taken to the hills. Each family group lived in its own cave, and there were not over one hundred such families altogether occupying this hill and several nearby heights.

Whereas the *Houyhnhnms* were once the dominant group in this country, they now seemed to be subservient to the Yahoos whom they despised and whom they regarded (rightfully) as semi-wild and intractable beasts. In Gulliver's day most Yahoos roamed the land naked like wild wolves or other marauding animals, but some were partially domesticated by the *Houyhnhnms* and were kept in pens tethered to stakes by ropes looped around

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their necks like "choke collars." Some Yahoos could even be trained to serve as beasts of burden and draw small carts for *Houyhnhnms* too old or feeble to walk or gallop by themselves. For the most part, however, the Yahoos were only wild, vicious, repugnant, destructive pests that could be tolerated only by *Hoyyhnhnms* who were superior to them both in physical strength and intellectual and moral fiber.

AS I continued to observe the *Houyhnhnms* in their remote and almost inaccessible caves and the Yahoos in the open plains below, it became more apparent each day that a reversal in political dominance had occurred and that now the *Houyhnhnms* were in the subservient position. It was only after I had been living with them for three weeks that I got up enough courage to ask the stallion who was the master of the household for an explanation. He, at first, expressed a lack of willingness to discuss the subject, but when I persisted he said that he was afraid that he might deceive me since he was not sure of the facts because he had only heard them from his grandfather.

To *lie* or *deceive* is still incomprehensible to the *Houyhnhnms*. Gulliver noted that they had *"no Word in their Language to express Lying or Falsehood"* and they are most reluctant to *"say the thing which was not."* The same is true today. The tradition of honesty and good breeding had persisted among these horses in spite of the deprivation they had been forced to endure these past two hundred-odd years. My host was reluctant, therefore, to provide me with any information of which he was not certain. When I assured him that I would consider his statements only as an *approximate* account, he then told me the following story. I believe it to be accurate for I checked many of the details with other sources both *Houyhnhnm* and Yahoo and found them historically valid. Some shades of meaning may be slightly altered in translation.

"My great grandfather," the stallion told me, "was a neighbor of the *Houyhnhnms* at whose home *Hullivhyn* [= *Gulliver*] lived and felt, at first, the natural repugnance for him that he had for all the native Yahoos of the country. After a while, however, he, like the others, began to be amused by Hullivhyn's odd traits; his evident intelligence beyond that of ordinary Yahoos, his gift of mimicking the equine way of speaking, but mostly his pre-occupation with clothes. At first, my great grandfather, like his friends, did not recognize Hullivhyn as being a Yahoo because clothing had deceived

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them. As time went on, however, my great grandfather became more and more alarmed at the *Houyhnhnms'* harboring a strange and foreign Yahoo in their midst and he repeatedly warned the others that no good could come of it.

IT was not until the Annual Spring *Houyhnhnm* Assembly two years later that he was able to convince the others that the presence of a semi-intelligent Yahoo in their midst was more of a threat to their security than all of the Yahoos around them. It was my great grandfather who finally forced Hullivhyn to leave our country. Perhaps my noble ancestor was mistaken; perhaps he wasn't. I don't know. Our troubles began after Hullivhyn left us. We don't harbor any grudges against the Yahoos. They are still as despicable as ever. What happened to us might have happened later anyhow. Sooner or later the Yahoos shall destroy each other and we shall again rule this fair and noble country."

"When Hullivhyn finally sailed away [the stallion continued] the lord in whose home he lived for the two years that he was with us threw all his clothes into a trash box intending to have his servants bury them on the following day. That night, however, some scavenging Yahoos found Hullivhyn's clothing and dressed themselves in them. It occurred to one of them, their leader, *Graak*, that it was Hullivhyn's clothing—and only his clothing —that distinguished him from other Yahoos and that was the only reason he had been befriended by us.

"That night *Graak* returned to his herd and, at first, they thought that Hullivhyn had desided to join them. They were impressed by his clothes even more than we because Yahoos always place such importance on *external* appearances. The others might have torn the clothes from his back, but *Graak* was stronger than they and he fought them off. When he had them subdued, he explained his diabolic plan. From that day on all the Yahoos began to trap small animals and birds such as *gnnæuhji* and *luhimuhji* and dressed themselves in their furs and feathers. Once the Yahoos began to wear clothes, they became even more arrogant than ever and came to believe that they were superior to the *Houyhnhnms* who, as you can see, need no foolish clothing because their own skins are more than adequate for the weather. If *Ylahh* [= *Supreme Majesty* or *Creator of All*] believed that *Houyhnhnms* needed feathers, He would have created them with feathers. I mean no offense to you, but you, yourself, can see

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that the Yahoos need furs and feathers because their own skin and fur is so inadequate and they are so miserable without them.

"By the *Time of the Ripe Grain* [= the Fall] all the Yahoos were wearing skins and began to march boldly up to our homes shouting taunts and defiance. Yahoos in skins could no longer be domesticated. Even those who were fit for no other tasks than being harnessed to pull our wagons turned upon their masters and beat them to death. It became no longer safe for any of us to wander out alone. Gangs even laid traps or dug trenches in the ground to capture and kill our innocent families.

"In the *Season of the Rain* in the *Year of the Disaster* [= Spring, *about* 1713], the Yahoos attacked in force and brutally murdered most of our families. My grandfather, who was then a young colt, escaped with his mother and two sisters and, with a few other survivors, fled to these hills where we now make our homes. Life has been difficult for us here. The grain is not as abundant as it is in the valley, but we are safe from the Yahoos who neither have the strength to get through the rugged passes nor climb the steep slopes.

"Besides, the Yahoos are too mean, stupid and vicious to establish any stable form of government. It is only a matter of a few years before they kill each other off, and then we shall again return to power without any further bloodshed or loss of *Houyhnhnm* life. We are in no hurry. We are certain of ultimate victory."

WHEN the stallion finished his narration, he gazed at me searchingly, apparently waiting for my reply. For a few minutes I was as speechless as if I were struck dumb. Finally, I regained my composure and, as best as I could, expressed *sympathy* to him for the loss of their land, *grief* for their heroic dead and an *eagerness* to make some recompense for their two centuries of suffering. I even offered to go among the Yahoos to preach to them and to instruct them in morality and ethical behavior. At this latter suggestion the stallion laughed so loud and long that froth came into his mouth. My suggestion, he said, proved that I was a Yahoo in spite of my better manners since only a Yahoo would be stupid enough to believe that the vile, innate characteristics of Yahoos could be improved either by persuasion or by example. The only things that the Yahoos understood were force, corruption, and deceit.

Now I suddenly realized that I had, in a way, made a *boast*

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and that I would no longer be able to remain among the *Houyhynhnms* without attempting to carry it out. If I were to "lose face," (the *Houyhnhnms* say, "*hyahy lyllooh nynnh*" which translated literally means "*abandon self-respect*"), I would be even further regarded as nothing but a despicable Yahoo. I, therefore, pleaded with the stallion to let me go to prove that my intentions were honorable and that not all Yahoos were unreliable or untrustworthy. Finally I convinced him of my integrity. He urged me, however, to stay a while longer so that his oldest son could teach me the Yahoo language and to wait until his wife or daughters could make me suitable Yahoo garments.

In two weeks everything was in readiness. The clothes were sewn together from animal skins. The Yahoo tongue was easily mastered since its guttural tones were quite similar to modern German which I learned in college but its vocabulary and syntax were less involved. Altogether I had spent almost three months amongst these kind, gentle, and intelligent horses and I left them with considerable sadness, and also, some apprehension as to how I might be received among the Yahoos.

ON the morning that I was to leave, the colt asked me to lie prone on the ground and he gently grasped the small of my back with his teeth (no Yahoo is ever permitted to ride a *Houyhnhnm* the way we would ordinarily ride a horse) and he quietly and firmly carried me down the rugged hillside. Before the sun was fully up we reached the base, and the colt gently let me down to the ground again. I gathered together my few belongings; several colored stones (Yahoo money) which the *Houyhnhnms* had generously given me, four slices of oatmeal bread that I had baked the day before, and *Nallgall*'s ring which was still in my pocket. From that day on I saw my *Houyhnhnm* friends only casually or from the distance. My life among the Yahoos had begun.

I set out for the nearest village which appeared to be about two miles away. The warm sun was pleasant and it was good to feel the level ground under my feet. I was again confident that I could get along with Yahoos when I considered I had survived my adventures in so many other countries whose inhabitants were even more strange and frightening that the Yahoos whom I, superficially at least, resembled. A stroke of good fortune provided me with a ready introduction into the Yahoo community.

As I traveled the tree-shaded road toward the village, I suddenly heard wild screams of pain be-

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hind me. Two teenage Yahoos, who apparently were waiting in ambush for me, were in turn ambushed by a third Yahoo who had sneaked up behind them. In the rough-and-tumble fight that ensued, two Yahoos ran off and one Yahoo was left lying writhing in pain. Instinctively I hurried back to examine the injured youth.

"Vah toot et vay?" I asked the fallen lad, inquiring as to where it hurt, in the Yahoo language that I had just been taught.

"Dah toot et vay," he replied pointing to his right ankle.

A quick examination revealed that he had probably fractured the tibial condyle. Hastily, from branches and twigs, I improvised a splint and relieved his pain. By the time I finished, the other lad had come back with the injured boy's father. Luck was with me. The boy's father was a prominent Yahoo (*"Hoker Garnit,"* translated either as *"Big Rock-Bag"* or *"President of Country Club"*). He was pleased with the care I had given the boy and exclaimed endlessly like a child over the ingenious splint I had devised. He complimented me on being a *"Groozer Arrtz"* (*"Good Doctor"*) and offered me the hospitality of his home.

This I readily accepted. For the next thirteen months I lived in relative peace among the Yahoos practicing (primitive) orthopedic surgery and taking copious notes as I observed and studied their institutions, manners, and mores. Without trying to appear immodest, I believe my study of the Yahoos, here reported, is the most exhaustive ever made on these uncivilized humanoids. Although some skeptics may doubt the validity of my findings, everything that I am about to disclose is based on my own personal experience and observation.

Hoker Garnit (I never knew him by any other name) and the boy who had summoned him helped the injured lad to his feet and let him support himself on their shoulders as they trudged along the road to the village. I followed by their side and in my mind compared these modern Yahoos with those that Gulliver had so graphically described. They were no longer the naked and wild, unshaved beasts of Gulliver's day.

Garnit wore a suit such as our men wear but the patchwork arrangement of the skins was clearly evident and each skin was dyed a different color so that my first impression was that I was viewing a Picasso harlequin. The jacket fitted appropriately but apparently animal skins are not easily obtainable so that the pants are tailored tightly, actually hugging the calf, the thigh, and the pelvis. As in our own

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country Yahoos measure a man's success by the size of his cuff links, and since *Hoker Garnit* was very successful, his cuff links were made of blue polished stone each weighing about a pound. I heard that there were several successful Yahoos who have cuff links that weigh three pounds each, but I did not meet any of these and so I am not certain.

YAHOO men today are clean-shaven and they use sharpened flint and sandstone (they have not yet discovered steel) for the shaving. Although most Yahoos can get shaved in about one-half hour, others take longer. What takes even more time, however, is the aftershave ritual of dousing the face with variously scented waters which are claimed to have an aphrodisiac effect on the females who come near them. Most Yahoos confine this ritual to after shaving but others will splash themselves with these lotions (most of which smell like old beer vats) three or four times each day.

At any rate we had now reached the village and *Hoker Garnit* led us directly to his home. Since his house is fairly representative of those found in Yahoo towns, a brief description can be considered typical. The house, itself, is made of baked clay bricks and open windows (unglassed) let in air. There is a central kitchen, the roof of which is dome-shaped and in which there is a central opening to let out smoke. Cooking is done either in a barbecue pit on the ground or a clay-block stand (the *hockflish garbel*) and each housewife takes great pride in her cooking. A Yahoo housewife who is unable to fatten her husband into an early grave regards herself as a dismal failure. In this way Yahoo wives do not differ significantly from some of our own good women.

The other rooms of *Hoker Garnit's* home consisted of a modern family room and several bedrooms. These were sparsely furnished with wooden chairs and tables but the beds were made of straw and rested directly on the floor. Whereas once the Yahoos were the dirtiest of all animals they now seem to have developed a pre-occupation with cleanliness. Consequently, the bathroom or lavatory (the *Vashenzikmakenplazz*) is the largest, the most splendid, the best decorated room in the entire house and it is equal in size to two or three average bedrooms. Modern Yahoos bathe daily or even more frequently. The dirtiness of the Yahoos lies under the skin, not on it.

We no sooner set foot in the door of the house and our brief introductions were made, when *Hoker Garnit's* wife began berat-

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ing him for his son's behavior. All her son's bad traits, his laziness, his untidiness, his evil companions were all, apparently, due somehow to her husband's lack of interest in his son. I was most embarrassed at witnessing this harangue that proceeded mercilessly in my presence. I expected that at any moment *Hoker Garnit* would, in rage, strike his wife down but he seemed to grow more sheepish as the tongue-lashing proceeded. As rough and as crude as Yahoo men are, they are apparently no match for Yahoo women.

IT was difficult for me, at first, to determine what *Hoker Garnit* did for a living, but he did leave for work every morning going to what he called the *Stinewekselshaft* which can be translated only approximately as "Bank" or "Stock Exchange." I am not certain which; perhaps there is no accurate translation. As far as I can understand, he exchanged rocks for other rocks. Often, if he had rocks which were worthless because of flaws in them, he concealed the flaws and shouted as loudly as he could that he had valuable stones to exchange for others. Apparently he was usually successful in his shouting and his manipulation of rocks that other Yahoos traded their more valuable stones for his inferior ones. At other times he buried desirable stones in a pit in his home till there was a shortage of them. In this way he increased the value of his stones further as the demand for them grew stronger. It was my understanding that most successful Yahoos did little more than trade rocks. In a country that places such value on rocks rather than productive labor or essential services, it is understandable why such rock-traders are held in highest esteem.

There is a curious custom among the Yahoos that further emphasizes their need and desire for rocks. When I first witnessed the ritual which I am going to describe, I was amazed, disgusted, and shocked; but, then, as I grew accustomed to the spectacle I found that I could watch it with some amusement. Each town has a central square or market place. At noon the *Shpeeler* blows loudly on a ram's horn, and a tall ladder (about two stories high) is erected in the square. Suddenly, as the horn is sounded, Yahoo men gather in the square from all parts of town. Each carries with him a sack full of rocks which he empties on scales placed in several locations around the upright ladder. The rocks are carefully weighed, and the Yahoo possessing the heaviest load of rocks quickly climbs up the ladder to the top position. The Yahoo with the second heaviest load

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goes up next while the unfortunate Yahoo with the lightest load is given the lowest rung on the ladder.

Once the Yahoos are in their appropriate positions, the ram's horn is again sounded. At this moment the Yahoo on the top rung of the ladder starts kicking the fellow below him while the man in second position begins to kiss the derrière of the man above him. This activity of kicking and kissing extends quickly down the entire length of the ladder; sometimes, if the kissing is successful, a Yahoo in a superior position allows the one "next in rank" to take his place. More often the kicking is more successful than the kissing and, at times, it is so vigorous as to topple a Yahoo from a more eminent place to a lower one or to knock him entirely off the ladder. Scant attention is paid to a Yahoo who falls or is forced into a lower rung while the Yahoo who rises a rung or two is loudly applauded by both the spectators on the ground and those on the ladder below him.

I MUST stress that this violent activity on the ladder is not a game but a serious enterprise indulged in by the Yahoos of each town and village in deadly earnest. Many a Yahoo descends from the ladder with multiple lacerations of the scalp and fractures of the nasal or facial bones. At the end of about two hours, the *Shpeeler* again blows the horn, the contestants descend from the ladder, and a temporary truce is restored until the next day when the ladder-fight (*Shtellenzooken*) is again resumed. In the quiet interval between these contests, the Yahoos busy themselves searching for more polished stones hoping that their load the next day would outweigh the load accumulated by their neighbors. I should note here, too, that it is *simply* the weight of the stones that counts in this contest and not the quality of the stone. Yahoos judge each other quantitatively, *not* qualitatively.

When I asked *Hoker Garnit* why this *Shtellenzooken* was such an important daily ceremony in their lives, he looked at me as if I were some simpleton who was unable to grasp or comprehend the simple facts of life. "The reason is obvious," he finally replied, "the view from the top rung of the ladder is *magnificent.* Naturally, every Yahoo is most anxious to get to the top so that he can view the breath-taking scenery around him and look down on the Yahoos beneath him." "You'd be surprised," he added, "how small the Yahoos look from the top. It's exhilirating. I, myself, dream of reaching the top some day. It's all a matter of collecting more rocks. Be-

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sides, how would you know who's on top each day without the *Shtellenzooken*? How do the Yahoos of your country know what their position is on the ladder?"

This was one of the rare occasions that *Hoker Garnit* (or any other Yahoo, for that matter) expressed any interest or curiosity about me or the people of my native land. I tried to answer him as honestly and completely as I could. I explained to him that in my country *Shtellenzooken* was less obvious but just as competitive, and it did go on among our Yahoos in more subtle and devious ways. I told him that some Yahoos in my country fought the *Shtellenzooken* by measuring the cubic volume of their homes and comparing it with their neighbor's. The larger the volume, the higher the position on the ladder. Other Yahoos engaged trappers to capture rare furry animals that they killed and skinned. Then these skins were sewn together and placed on the backs of their wives or other female companions. Those women who could wear the greatest number of skins without being exhausted by the load were regarded with frank envy by other Yahoo women who had no animal skins or only a few. The weight of the skins was the sole determinant of the Yahoo's position on the *Shtellenzooken* ladder.

Some Yahoos wear small colored or colorless stones which they attach to their fingers with metal bands or adorn other parts of their bodies such as ear lobes or wrists, while still other Yahoos place special emphasis on intricately stamped pieces of paper. Yahoos who are physicians, I admitted regretfully, often consider other professions or trades as being below them on the *Shtellenzooken* ladder and, of those Yahoos, surgeons usually regard themselves as the most eminent of all and constantly try to convince all the other Yahoos in their circle that *their* view is the view from the top. Since Yahoos are readily suggestible, these surgeons achieve recognition and a place on the ladder that is incomprehensible to most non-Yahoos.

A POET, for example, who could write beautiful poetry but who has few rocks, few skins on his wife's back, or few stamped pieces of paper inevitably is given a lower position than the illiterate Yahoo with more of these prized material possessions. Most often highest positions are achieved by those Yahoos who are leaders in the manufacture of explosives and other deadly weapons or Yahoos who own lands that rest on subterranean lakes of petroleum or oil which they may have inherited from their ancestors. The

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devoted school teacher, the scholarly academician, the talented performer in a symphony orchestra are all forced together on the lowest rungs, where, apparently, they do not compete vigorously either with each other or with those above them for loftier status. That art can provide a satisfaction in itself is inconceivable to Yahoos.

When I finished my discussion with *Hoker Garnit*, he replied that he could not understand why the natives of my country had developed such involved methods for evaluating other citizens. He vigorously defended the *Shtellenzooken* custom of his country by pointing out that it achieved the same ends as the more involved methods that I had described but was simpler, more direct, and more honestly and openly determined the relative positions of individuals on the *Shtellenzooken*. He also pointed out that the Yahoos of his country actually weighed their rocks in the open whereas my countrymen through fraud and deceit might induce others to believe that they possessed more rocks than they actually had and thus would achieve eminence through sham and pretense. Ruefully, I had to admit the validity of his arguments.

Some readers may wonder how I came to be so readily accepted among the Yahoos without their inquiring into my background and origin or expressing any curiosity of how I happened to be on the road where they found me. The answer is simple. Yahoos have only a fleeting and cursory interest in persons other than themselves. They make a brief inquiry into another Yahoo's health or into his family or business status, but this interest is only momentary and the Yahoo, without even waiting for a reply, almost immediately begins discussing his *own problems*. I have kept detailed notes of Yahoo conversations that I heard and record them *verbatim*.

"How are you, *Hoker*? Do you recall that business deal I was telling you about yesterday? It came through. I've finally cornered the market in blue agates and arranged for a loan on some marbelized sandstones. We are going to form a etc, etc—." (*Hoker* never got a chance to tell his friend that he had been ill for two days and nights with cramps, nausea, and diarrhea. Furthermore, the friend was so busy talking about *himself* that he took no notice whatsoever of *Hoker's* gray-green expression.)

"Do you like this little hat I bought, *Ganza* [Mrs. Garnit]? I think it's a darling and *Dolph* likes it too. He says the feathers at the top make me look so much younger. It cost only 37 red agates [about 18 dollars] and the

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saleslady said it was an exclusive. I'm planning to wear it to the *Brabrabra* tonight and to the, etc., etc., —." (*Ganza* never got a chance to tell her friend that she had purchased an identical hat two days earlier for 28 red agates.)

"Did you have a busy day at the *Stinewekselshaft, Hoker* dear? I'm exhausted. You must tell that lazy son of yours that I'm not going to stand for his bringing all his friends here like he did today. Dinner's not ready yet. So you'll have to wait and after dinner, etc., etc.," (*Hoker Garnit* never got a chance to tell his wife that he lost 1200 opals and 950 amethysts in one business deal and was about bankrupt.)

IT was because of this lack of interest of Yahoos in anything or anybody besides themselves that I was able to be accepted among the Yahoos as one of them. Furthermore, as time went on, my reputation as a bone-setter (*Rookenarrtz*) spread among them and I was later able to accumulate enough stones to purchase a modest home of my own. Since I was still anxious to return to my own wife in the United States, I carefully avoided any ties or affairs with female Yahoos that might prove embarrassing or might lead to my settling permanently in their country. On several occasions, nevertheless, when I returned home I found a female Yahoo in my bed waiting expectantly for me. Sometimes by persuasion and sometimes by actual force, I indicated my unwillingness to satisfy their amorousness and led them or ejected them from my house. All I can say at this point is that anyone who makes love to a Yahoo deserves the punishment that he gets. To go to bed each night with a female Yahoo and listen to her noisy, incessant, high-pitched chatter can drive a man insane. Male Yahoos, however, are apparently deaf to high frequency sound waves; they don't seem to mind.

A currently prevalent custom among Yaoos is the *Brabrabra.* Since no mention of the *Brabrabra* is made in Gulliver's original accounts, I assume that it came into being in more modern times only after the Yahoos learned to wear clothing. Like the jostling on the *Shtellenzooken,* attendance at *Brabrabras* is a measurement of a Yahoo's success, and every Yahoo tries to attend as many of them as possible or invite as many of his friends to *Brabrabras* at his own home. In my thirteen months with the Yahoos, I went to more than twenty *Brabrabras* and became quite familiar with this custom and the behavior of the participants.

The real purpose of a *Brabra-*

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bra is to pay off some social obligations or as the Yahoos say to "*hoberfremdenklig.*" Since most Yahoos have an innate and natural distaste for the company of their neighbors and friends, they never meet with them socially in small groups where quiet personal discussions might take place but prefer larger, noisy, crowded affairs. Similarly most Yahoos so despise other Yahoos (especially those who are below them on the *Shtellenzooken*), that they would never consider *sitting* down with them at dinner. Consequently, the *Brabrabra* enables one Yahoo to mingle sorially with many other Yahoos without ever getting to really know them. It enables a Yahoo to invite many other Yahoos to his home or to his place of business, usually newly opened, without subjecting himself to the boredom of their company. Having lived among the Yahoos for such a long time, I might say that I can't blame them.

IN practice the host or hostess who arranges the *Brabrabra* first decides how many Yahoos are to be invited. Rarely the number is less than thirty, and it may often run into a hundred or more. The next thing is to arrange the furniture so that less than one guest in ten can have a chair to sit upon. The usual proportion established by custom is to have twelve times as many guests as there are chairs. This keeps the Yahoos on their feet most of the evening (or afternoon) and prevents the duller ones from falling asleep. Then vile and salty bits of chopped and macerated foods are placed on small bits of bread (*"pferdeneigen"*) and distributed in plates on narrow tables which are arranged in such a fashion that the Yahoos have to push and shove each other to get to them. Yahoos, however, seem to prize the *pferdeneigen* as delicacies and may actually fight with each other to get near the table. In general Yahoos seem to enjoy such jostlings and elbowing and, for them, it is part of the excitement and pleasure of the *Brabrabra.*

The mainstay of the *Brabrabra,* however, is the *drinking.* There is practically nothing that a Yahoo won't drink especially if it's fermented. Consequently, Yahoos ferment not only grains such as rye, oats, rice but also honey, mare's milk (a practice which the *Houyhnhnms* resent), apples, berries, and many other animal and vegetable products to make alcoholic beverages. These beverages are prized among most of them only second to their colored stones, but some Yahoos esteem them most of all.

At the *Brabrabra* guests are required to stand around in small

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groups, each holding a glass of beverage in one hand and *Pferdeneigen* in the other. He is further required to compliment his host on the excellence of both food and drink even though he may be slightly nauseated or even ill from their effects. When he is bored with the conversation in one group he is required to move to the next until he is again bored and then moves through most if not all of the groups. Sometimes, ambitious Yahoos who are anxious for better positions on the *Shtellenzooken* move vigorously from one group to another hoping to find some successful Yahoo whose derrière he might effectively kiss at this time and avoid the more vigorous grappling on the *Shtellenzooken.*

In about two or three hours the guests at the *Brabrabra* are usually exhausted from standing, bored by the inane utterances of other Yahoos, nauseated and thirsty from the *Pferdeneigen,* or frankly intoxicated from the beverages and so, singly or in pairs they leave the *Brabrabra.* They then mumble something complimentary to the host or hostess as they depart. The few Yahoos who were fortunate enough to find seats and still sitting are reminded by their hosts that the other guests have already left and, in some cases, are actually helped to their feet (if they fail to take the hint) and are maneuvered through the door. As the door is closed behind the last guest, the host and hostess congratulate each other on having got rid of them and start preparing the next guest list. Ambitious Yahoos often attend two or three *Brabrabras* each week; for some it may be said to be a way of life.

THE leader of the Yahoos (the *Nixnix*) is, in a sense, an elected official and serves for a period of three years; he can succeed himself in office. The *Nixnix* currently in rule had already served for eleven years when I was there and it is likely that he is still in power. Choice of this elected official is based, I believe, largely on *oratory* rather than on the solid qualities of leadership which we cherish in our democracy. The man selected to be the *Nixnix* must be capable of making huge promises with impassioned sincerity. He must possess a talent for uttering banal platitudes as if they were newly-minted truths. He must be skillful in his promise of more material things, especially more colored stones and more engraved bits of paper for the Yahoos who prize them so highly.

Once elected, the *Nixnix selects* those Yahoos who, like himself, have no interest in carrying out or implementing the promises made to the people but only

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desire self-perpetuation in office. Since Yahoos have only a short memory-span (apparently it doesn't exceed two months) they continually vote into office those officials whose promises are vast but whose capabilities are limited. Should an occasional Yahoo call attention that a discrepancy exists between *promises* and *actions*, he is made a minor government official or provided with extra rocks that secure to him a higher place on the *Shtellenzooken;* thus he is effectively stilled. While in office each official, elected or appointed, devotes much of his time securing more colored rocks for himself and his family. Some officials have left their government positions having accumulated ten to twenty times more stones than their salary could account for. No wonder, then, that every Yahoo desired to obtain an official position.

In every town and village, election practices follow closely the patterns established in the selection of the *Nixnix*. While patronage is officially denounced, it is a major *sub rosa* activity. My friend, *Hoker Garnit,* for example, was quietly advised by his father-in-law whose official position is comparable to that of Secretary of the Interior, that the government was about to wage war with a neighboring tribe; and, on the basis of this advance information, he purchased several rock quarries. The cost of these quarries to Hoker was 2,700 brown agates and he, in turn, sold them to the government for 18,000 red agates and 2,150 turquoises. Expressed in our currency his profit from this one deal amounted to approximately 56,000 dollars. The government quarried the rocks for about two weeks, stockpiled some of them in pits rented from other members of the *Garnit* family but never used them since a truce was declared.

I was witness to many such episodes and heard of many more, but space does not permit me to go into as many details as I would like. Suffice it to say that Yahoos condone "deals" and engage in them to an extent that would be incomprehensible to the average American whose government is based on the highest ethical conduct of its elected and appointed officials.

Since I am an orthopedic surgeon and not an expert in political science, my interest naturally turned to a study of Yahoo medical practices. The fondness of the Yahoos for both medications and therapeutic exercises of one sort or another really surprised me. There is nothing so vile or foul that a Yahoo won't swallow it if it has been recommended by another Yahoo as being of medicinal value. Medications recommended by one's wife or by a

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Yahoo who is a rung or two higher on the *Shtellenzooken* are preferred over medicines prescribed by the tribal medicine man (*Groozer Arrtzfhtig*). Most preferred are those remedies that are carried into each town by itinerant hawkers and criers and sold directly to the inhabitants.

ALMOST every morning during my stay with *Hoker Garnit*, I observed each adult member of the household rub some greasy substance into his scalp, inhale a highly perfumed liquid, and swallow a spoonful or two of a brown mixture whose composition was never disclosed to me. When I queried *Garnit* about this ritual, he expressed some surprise that I, as a doctor, didn't know all about these things. The greasy substance, he explained, was *brain food* (*Kernesfross*). Without its daily application to the scalp, the brain would soften leading to idiocy or insanity. The brain needed its daily application, he said, and could only be nourished this way. The high intelligence of the Yahoo, he boasted, was due to the fact that they were the sole discoverers and possessors of *Kernesfross* and were so diligent in its use. The highly perfumed inhalation (the *Viberhisenstoof*) kept each Yahoo sexually attractive and fit. Inhaled through the lungs, it penetrated the whole body and was excreted through the genital organs. The virility of the Yahoo male and the great sexual charm of the Yahoo female were based on daily (or more frequent) inhalations of *Viberhisenstoof*. As for the brown mixture, *Hoker Garnit*, himself, could not recall why it was necessary but he knew that all his neighbors and friends used it. So, obviously, it must be good.

Fortunately, most of the time that I was with the Yahoos I remained in good health and had no need of their physicians or their medicines. However, on one occasion I caught a severe cold perhaps even bordering on a pneumonia, and it might have ended in my death had I not been able to outwit the physician whom *Garnit* had sent to care for me. It happened like this.

One evening I had gone by myself to a nearby stream to bathe. Carefully, I placed all my clothes on a rock at the edge of the bank and plunged in. The water was refreshing and I swam around for a half-hour or more. As I prepared to leave and strode toward the bank, I could see in the dim light a young female Yahoo sitting on the rock and she had all my clothes wrapped as a bundle in her arms. When I asked her to leave my clothes alone and go home, she laughed mockingly at me and challenged me to capture her. Since I knew what she had

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in mind, I scolded her and decided to remain in the water rather than to make a spectacle of myself or cooperate with her in her amorous desires. After about an hour I got chilled and decided I had no alternative but to try to chase her away. As I reached the bank, she scampered off laughing and carrying all my clothes with her. Rather than chase her, I made my way home naked, using the back woods so as to avoid being seen. By the time I got home I was thoroughly chilled and exhausted.

THE next morning I knew I was sick. Chills racked my body and my sides ached from paroxysms of coughing. Judging by how feverishly I felt, my body temperature must have been 103°F or higher. When *Hoker Garnit* dropped by to see me on his way to the *Stinewekselshaft*, he found me lying in bed and he offered to send me his physician. I was in no position to refuse.

The doctor, it turned out, was one who did not believe in conventional medicine but held to the views that all illness could be cured by exercises that keep the body fit. The first thing he did was to order me out of bed and do twelve push-ups. It took every ounce of my strength but I carried his orders out. Then he ordered me back to bed and massaged my back and rubbed and rubbed until every bone ached. Finally, he got me out of bed again for 22 deep knee-bends.

Obviously this Yahoo doctor was a devotée of physical fitness and believed that a regular program of exercises could cure everything. I completed the exercises which he insisted I do but fell back into bed exhausted. As he left he said he would return the next day for a longer workout with me. I knew then, however, that I must escape from his well-intentioned but ill-advised program of therapy if I were to survive. As soon as he was outside my house, I gathered together a few pitchers of water, some food and some heavy clothing and took off for a small cave that I had discovered in the woods near the hills where the *Houyhnhnms* lived. Better, I thought, to die by myself than to be killed by the attention of this Yahoo.

After four days of rest and quiet in the cave, my fever subsided and I was again able to return home. Within another few days, I was again reasonably well and went to visit *Hoker Garnit*. When I saw *Hoker* I politely thanked him for sending me his doctor. "Oh," *Hoker* replied, "he's the best. See how he cured you so quickly with his treatment. Don't you think his exercises are wonderful? They're

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the only way to get a sick Yahoo well. Don't you think so?" Tactfully I mumbled something in the affirmative, but I could not help but wonder whether more Yahoos had been killed than cured by cultists whether they be Yahoos, faithhealers, naturopaths, analysts, or devotées of physical culture.

There are so many other facets of Yahoo culture that I can mention here only briefly. My notes, however, are detailed and intact and I shall have more to say on Yahoo morals and mores in a book devoted exclusively to this subject. Marital fidelity is so loosely observed that for all practical purposes Yahoos may be considered both polygamous and polyandrous although, superficially, they appear to practice monogamy. Multiple spouses are arranged either in a *temporal* sequence, one following the other in time, or in a *spatial* sequence with different spouses in different parts of town. Both rich and poor Yahoos seem to enjoy more latitude in these matters than middleclass Yahoos but the difference is not as great as one would believe on casual inspection. I regret, also, that I cannot devote more time to a detailed analysis of their politics, their religion, their agriculture, or their business. Suffice it to say that in their religion they worship a sort of personal deity (*Kutkott*) who is called upon for help and salvation in times of stress or hardship but is completely forgotten during periods of peace and prosperity. In business matters, the Yahoo is completely cynical, expecting to cheat or be cheated. Since the height of one's position on the *Shtellenzooken* is the most important mark of success, the only thing that matters to the business-minded Yahoo is the current weight of rocks possessed.

IN the area of cultural activity, modern Yahoos, unlike those of Gulliver's day, do have communal entertainment such as the theatre, music, and art exhibits. Since I attended many of these affairs both by myself and in the company of *Hoker Garnit*, I can speak with some authority on this subject.

Week after week I went to see their new dramatic productions. I found that the stage was relatively bare and that the "play" consisted of two, three, or four characters (*never* more than four; a Yahoo is apparently uneasy and embarrassed in the presence of a larger cast) who hurled obscenities at each other. The more vile the obscenities, the more delighted were the Yahoos. In one play, for example, the first act consisted of a man accusing his wife of marital infidelities as he enumerated them

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one by one. In the second act, the wife accused her husband of comparable or even more colossal infidelities. That was all there was to the play; but the Yahoos were entranced, and after the play, many of them commented on the deep insight that the author had into their innermost thoughts. Others were equally impressed with the author's faithful recording of Yahoo language and mannerisms. Still others commented with considerable approbation on the symbolism depicted by the broken ladder and the three-legged stool that were the only props on the otherwise bare stage.

In another play one character addressed all his comments to a banana which he handled fondly as a phallic symbol. Although his gestures were crude and vulgar, the audience applauded enthusiastically when the second-act curtain came down. For plays to be a Yahoo success they apparently must deal with sexual aberations such as homosexuality, incest, nymphomania, or worse.

The arrangement of seats in the Yahoo theatre or concert hall deserves special comment. In some of the smaller theatres the seats face the doors at the rear of the theatre and the back of the audience is turned toward the stage. The reason for this is that most Yahoos go to the theatre or concert not to see or hear the production but to discover which of their friends are in the audience. In the early Yahoo theatres the seats were conventionally placed like our own, but so many Yahoos kept turning their heads back to the rear and waving to their friends that they decided that it would be best if the audience faced the entrance of the theatre rather than the performers on the stage. In some of the larger and more modern theatres, the entrances now are at the front on each side of the stage, and this is most gratifying to the Yahoos because they can wave to their friends and watch the show at the same time.

BY now I had been among the *Houhyhnhnms* and the *Yahoos* for almost three years, and I was anxious to return home. Since the Yahoos have no knowledge of navigation and are apparently incapable of building boats, I had decided to return to the *Houhyhnhnms* and have them build a large canoe for me as they had for Gulliver 250 years ago. However, I never had to resort to this plan because one day there was a terrific storm at sea; and a few days later, large fragments of a wrecked vessel were driven to our shore. From these fragments I was able to build a large raft and stock it suitably with provisions. I also

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constructed an adequate sail from the skin which Yahoos use for clothing. From other fragments I built a serviceable rudder and tiller.

I could no longer remain among the Yahoos. I had become more and more disgusted with them the more I got to know them. I decided, therefore, that if I didn't leave now I would, in time, degenerate to their level. I would rather take my chance at survival at sea than become a Yahoo.

And so on the morning of November 3, 1962, I boarded my raft and was shoved out into the open sea by *Hoker Garnit* and his two sons. There were no tearful partings because the Yahoos, apparently, were no more pleased to have me among them (in spite of my reputation as a physician) then I was to be in their land. The plan that I had in mind was to head northeast using the sun and stars as my guide with the hope of getting to Sumatra.

Fortune was with me. On the third day at sea I was picked up by a Portuguese freighter, the *Blessed Virgin,* whose captain was *Manoel Prado.* At first he was shocked by my appearance and, with the language barrier (I could speak no Portuguese), the task of explaining my situation, my clothing and foreign manners was difficult, indeed. However, one of the deck hands, *Alfredo Gonzales da Silva,* had an American wife and spoke English fairly well. He acted as our interpreter. From then on my trip was uneventful and restful.

After stopping briefly at Surabaja and Manila, we then headed east to San Francisco and on the dawn of December 12, 1962, we sailed through the Golden Gate Bridge into San Francisco bay. No sight on earth was ever more beautiful to me.

The sapphire ring in my pocket, however, reminded me that I still had one unfinished task before I could return home. I had to find *Maria Angelica Torres,* the former fiancée of *Nallgall* in *Balnibari.* He had given me my freedom in return for the promise that I had made that I would someday find his beloved and give the ring to her. Had it not been for *Nallgall,* I would have died in prison in *Balnibari,* one of Gulliver's magic islands. It seemed possible now that I could make my promise to *Nallgall* come true.

Once I was on shore I traded practically all of the semi-precious stones that I had accumulated during my stay with the Yahoos. I had kept only the more valuable ones; amethysts, opals, and a few rubies. I was able to get $3865 for them. With the money I bought clothing, wired to my wife in Boston that I would soon be with her and later

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called her from my room at the Fairmount Hotel, telling her of my plans. My wife was overjoyed to find me still alive and was most anxious to fly west to meet me. I persuaded her, however, to remain home and explained to her the nature of my unfinished business, my quest for *Maria Angelica Torres.*

I RENTED a car in San Francisco and drove down Route I to Monterey. The joy of being back in my own country was more exhilarating than I had ever known.

Monterey is a relatively small town, and I had no trouble tracing the *Torres* family. *Maria Angelica,* I learned, had married an American sailor six years after *Nallgall* was forced to return to *Balnibari.* Unhappily, she had died in childbirth, and her husband had remarried and left Monterey for parts unknown. *Maria Angelica's* daughter, however, who was now 11 years old, was being brought up by an aunt, her mother's sister. Without too much trouble I found this young child and was pleased when I could place the valuable ring in her hands. I did not bother to tell any of them the whole story as to how this ring came into my possession; but I simply told the child that it was a gift from her mother, something that her mother wanted her to have.

I returned to San Francisco on December 18, 1962, and immediately took a jet back to Boston. My wife, Pamela, was at Logan Airport to greet me, but my uncle had had a coronary in the years that I was with the *Yahoos* and was too ill to meet the plane.

During the past year I have been home with my wife and we now have a month-old son, LeRoy Choate, and I have almost forgotten the Yahoos. Every now and then, however, I find one at a medical meeting or at the theatre or even in the "polite society" in which I travel and my hair unconsciously bristles. Like Gulliver, I have also developed a tremendous affection for horses since they remind me of the kind *Houyhnhnms* who had befriended me and had literally saved my life. I have busied myself in the practice of orthopedic surgery more so than ever since my uncle, LeRoy Bradford, has retired.

At present, in my spare time I still review Gulliver's old notes and compare his experiences with mine. Perhaps, at a later date, some other adventurer will retrace our steps. Who knows what he shall find then?

THE END

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(*Continued from page 69*)

peered in, startled by the grotesque sight, realizing at last to my dismay that it was Gliddon.

"*Mrs.* Gliddon," I cried, using her title for the first time in our acquaintance. "What has happened to your husband?"

"He will tell you," she said softly in her curiously accented tones. As she moved off, I became aware of her enormous grief. When she had left the room, I sat there in the partial gloom, waiting for some word from Gliddon. He said nothing. In my agitation, I removed the Banya bread from my pocket and commenced to munch on it. There was a croaking noise out of the figure from where I surmised the mouth must be.

"The Banya absorbs," he said.

"I know, Gliddon," I said soothingly. "But what of it?"

"Olfactory G, when ingested," said Gliddon haltingly, "becomes part of the human's sweat. Any human who eats the fruit of a sprayed Banya tree. . . ."

In spite of my usually firm self control, drops of perspiration began to ooze from my forehead and palms. I dropped the Banya bread to the matted floor and stared at it with loathing. And for the first time in my life, I wished that I, too, had an aborigine wife, a wife who would circle *my* house with lime pits.

THE END

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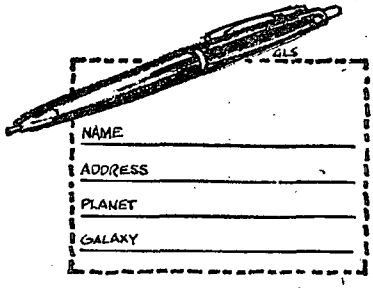

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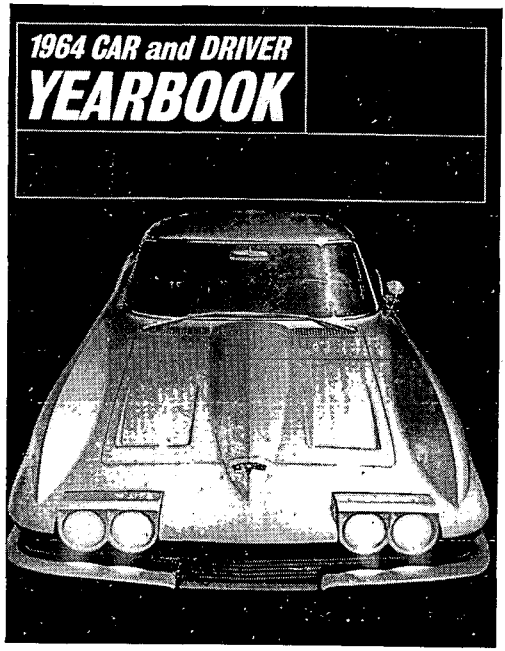

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